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HOW TO WRITE  
POETRY



# How to Write Poetry

BY

ETHEL M. COLSON

Author of "How to Read Poetry," etc.

*Brazelton*

## THE GOSPEL OF ART

*Work thou for pleasure; paint or sing or carve  
The thing thou lovest, though the body starve.  
Who works for glory misses oft the goal;  
Who works for money coins his very soul;  
Work for the work's sake, then, and it may be  
That these things shall be added unto thee.*

—KENYON COX



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To

My dear Husband

The surest path to experience (of delight in poetry), lies not through reading, but through making it. Better than faith or cherished idleness, better even than the understanding of poetry as a way to learn the enjoyment of it — and that without alienation from the better poem of one's own existence — is to create it for one's self.

— Max Eastman

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## THE MUSES

---

Of old the Muses sat on high,  
And heard and judged the songs of men;  
On one they smiled, who loitered by;  
Of toiling ten, they slighted ten.

“They lightly serve who serve us best,  
Nor know they how the task was done;  
We Muses love a soul at rest,  
But violence and toil we shun.”

If men say true, the Muses now  
Have changed their ancient habitude,  
And would be served with knitted brow,  
And stress and toil each day renewed.

So each one with the other vies,  
Of those who weave romance or song:  
“On us, O Muse, bestow thy prize,  
For we have striven well and long!”

And yet methinks I hear the hest

Come murmuring down from Helicon:

“They lightly serve who serve us best,

Nor know they how the task was done!”

— Edith M. Thomas

## PREFACE

---

This little book is offered without apology. No apology is needed for any effort, however humble, attempting to further the great cause and art of poetry. As well attempt apology for seeking to augment popular appreciation of love or music or sunshine. But a word of explanation may not be out of place.

It is not hoped by means of this modest bantling to increase the outward and visible supply of poets. Poets, whatever may have been said and thought to the contrary, are born and not made. So are musicians, painters, actors, artists of whatever order. But who, for this reason, would deny to the ordinary educated human some slight technical knowledge—at least enough for intelligent appreciation—of music or the drama or art?

Nobody not poetically gifted by God, the Great Poet, will be enabled to produce poetry — real poetry, not mere poetic craft work — as a result of this or any other poetic study. The technique of any art is a thing far apart from its genius, even admitting genius to be largely composed of hard and devoted labor. But just as the profoundest genius in the realms of harmony or color or sculpture or dramatic outpouring can attain fullest self-expression only by means of long and arduous training, so the poetic genius, super-endowed though he may be, can but turn out better poems for fuller understanding of the material, the medium in and through which he works.

Poetry alone of all the arts, has had no training schools, at least in modern times no studious, learned, and devoted professors. It may be that from its very nature it can have none. It has been tacitly held — perhaps because a modicum of training in “higher English,” including some attempt at poetic analyzation and writing, is given in high schools and colleges, perhaps because the

poetic art is so superlatively high and noble, so transcends all others—that the poet can find his own artistic way uncharted. Is it not reasonable to suppose, on the other hand, that time and effort, possibly even genius, may be conserved if the poetic aspirant receive early and proper training in the basic facts of his art?

Many a would-be musical or artistic genius, again, through intensive training discovers his cherished gift to be but talent, and, while always and incalculably the richer for his quickened insight into the chosen field of artistic endeavor, by the indicated training is saved from bitter failure. The world is full of musical and artistic enjoyers, critics, spectators, supporters who have come up through the ranks of the talented, carefully trained aspirants after higher honors. Technical training, in such case, has worked a kindly miracle both ways.

This little book, however, while hoping to clear the poetic skies for some whose working windows may be darkened, is in no sense intended to be either exhaustive or elementary.

It is assumed that those sufficiently interested in the writing of poetry to read books about it already are acquainted with the little that may be known of the laws of English prosody or at least know how and where to find them. And those who desire to follow far the keen study of poetic production are commended to such admirable works as Max Eastman's sympathetic treatise on *The Enjoyment of Poetry*; C. E. Andrews' enlightening and comprehensive volume, *The Reading and Writing of Verse*; Marguerite Wilkinson's *The New Voices, An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry*; and *The New Era in American Poetry*, by Louis Untermeyer. Each of these books, especially, perhaps, that of Professor Andrews, will help the serious, poetic student to much that he ought to know.

Here, between your hands, is but a mild attempt to "point the way, however dimly" to deepened appreciation of the art as well as the charm of good poetry, to suggest to the poetry lover who fain would produce as well as appreciate certain main-traveled

roads leading to the poetic Elysium. The writer believes, with Holy Writ, that "Whoso doeth the deed shall know the doctrine," and also believes, with the wise and witty J. B. Kerfoot, that "One may learn more about poetry from watching its squirms than from all the pronouncements of all the pundits"—and, it might be added, from all the pronouncements of all the poets themselves.

For this reason, if for no other, the generous measure of interpolated poetry stands undefended and self-sufficient to all seekers. The reader of *How to Write Poetry* cannot but gain incalculably, both in pleasure and scholarship, by perusal of the various and varied illustrative examples submitted, while it is frankly hoped that whetting taste of these poetic dainties may lead to prompt further acquaintance with the work of the numerous and brilliant poets so kindly allowing their poems to be so used.



## EXCERPT FROM SOLOMON'S SONG

---

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. . . .

My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away . . . .



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# HOW TO WRITE POETRY

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## OFF THE GROUND

Three jolly Farmers  
Once bet a pound  
Each dance the others would  
Off the ground.  
Out of their coats  
They slipped right soon,  
And neat and nicesome,  
Put each his shoon.  
One — Two — Three! —  
And away they go,  
Not too fast,  
And not too slow;

Out from the elm-tree's  
Noonday shadow,  
Into the sun,  
And across the meadow.  
Past the schoolroom,  
With knees well bent,  
Fingers a-flicking,  
They dancing went.  
Up sides and over,  
And round and round,  
They crossed click-clacking,  
The Parish bound,  
By Tupman's meadow  
They did their mile,  
Tee-to-tum  
On a three-barred stile.  
Then straight through Whipham,  
Downhill to Week,  
Footing it lightsome,  
But not too quick,  
Up fields to Watchet,  
And on through Wye,  
Till seven fine churches  
They'd seen skip by—  
Seven fine churches,

And five old mills,  
Farms in the valley,  
And sheep on the hills;  
Old Man's Acre  
And Dead Man's Pool  
All left behind,  
As they danced through Wool.  
And Wool gone by,  
Like tops that seem  
To spin in sleep  
They danced in dream:  
Withy—Wellover—  
Wassop—Wo—  
Like an old clock  
Their heels did go.  
A league and a league  
And a league they went,  
And not one weary,  
And not one spent.  
And lo, and behold!  
Past Willow-cum-Leigh  
Stretched with its waters  
The great green sea.  
Says Farmer Bates,  
"I puffs and I blows,

What's under the water,  
Why, no man knows!"  
Says Farmer Giles,  
"My wind comes weak,  
And a good man drowned  
Is far to seek."  
But Farmer Turvey,  
On twirling toes  
Up's with his gaiters,  
And in he goes:  
Down where the mermaids  
Pluck and play  
On their twangling harps  
In a sea-green day;  
Down where the mermaids,  
Finned and fair,  
Sleek with their combs  
Their yellow hair. . . .  
Bates and Giles—  
On the shingle sat,  
Gazing at Turvey's  
Floating hat.  
But never a ripple  
Nor bubble told  
Where he was supping

Off plates of gold.  
Never an echo  
Rilled through the sea  
Of the feasting and dancing  
And minstrelsy.  
They called—called—called:  
Came no reply:  
Nought but the ripples'  
Sandy sigh.  
Then glum and silent  
They sat instead,  
Vacantly brooding  
On home and bed,  
Till both together  
Stood up and said:—  
“Us knows not, dreams not,  
Where you be,  
Turvey, unless  
In the deep blue sea;  
But axcusing silver—  
And it comes most willing—  
Here's us two paying  
Our forty shilling;  
For it's sartin sure, Turvey,  
Safe and sound,

You danced us square, Turvey,  
Off the ground!"

—Walter de la Mare.



## CHAPTER I

### WHY WRITE POETRY?

**W**HY write poetry? For a variety of reasons—always supposing, as steady basis, that the spirit so move you. From beginning to end of our informal reasoning together it will be assumed that only on such basis will the high and pleasing task be essayed.

Write poetry, first and last, because you enjoy doing so. Try to write poetry if you will for the same reason. But never, NEVER, NEVER attempt the writing of poetry, for any possible, imaginable, hypothetical reason, unless you feel this impulse, urge, desire.

Such desire, such impulse granted, write poetry—and “write poetry” herein and throughout this volume must be understood to include also intelligent effort to do so—because poetry writing is a rare, a wonderful art, the greatest of all arts in the opinion of

many great artists; because to express one's soul, however weakly, however inadequately, in poetry, or even in "verse and worse," as Lamb had it, is to be immeasurably the richer, happier, better. ✕ Write poetry because the poorest of poetry at least means broadened response to verbal rhyme or rhythm, while to increase the extant supply of any decent sort of rhyme or rhythm, of strong or beautiful or vivid or delicate word pictures, of imaginative fancies made concrete and real through fitting language, means adding to the harmony, the beauty, the music of the world. ✕

Write poetry because to write poetry will greatly enrich your prose writing—to say nothing of your prose reading. Write poetry because so will you learn the better to value and appreciate that most wonderful of symbols, the written word, and to have a nicer sense of its varied uses and meaning. Write poetry because, **HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY**, you desire to say it in most melodious or impressive manner, to endow it with longest possible lease of life. Write poetry

because you hope, at least, to attempt the creation of something that may never die.

It's a wonderful thing to endow a phrase, a thought, a line, an idea with life, and your chance of so doing is much greater if poetry rather than prose be the chosen medium of expression. For even mediocre verse has better hope of being remembered by the casual reader than the finest prose, just as a strain of commonplace but pleasing melody is remembered by thousands whom the most magnificent of non-melodic harmonies might leave untouched. Write poetry because to write poetry is to reach out toward the greatest, most magical spirits of time and eternity, to establish sympathetic communication between the things of this and a nobler world.

"What is it to be a poet?" asks Lord Dunsany, discoverer of poets and himself a delicate dealer in the narrowly allied soul-products of poetry and drama. "It is to see at a glance the glory of the world, to see beauty in all its forms and manifestations, to feel ugliness like a pain, to resent the

wrongs of others as bitterly as one does one's own, to know mankind as others know single men, to know Nature as botanists know a flower, to be thought a fool, to hear at moments the clear voice of God."

"The poets are never wrong," says Dunsany again, in slightly different vein and paraphrasing James Huneker's quaint contention that because Debussy's vision was authentic, because "he knew that the core of reality is poetry," Debussy was a poet. "For of all material for labor, dreams are the hardest, and the artificer is the chief of workers, who out of nothing will make a piece of work that may stop a child from crying or lead nations to higher things."

Lieutenant Robert Nichols, brave soldier and poet, means much the same as Huneker and Dunsany when he urges his hearers to "Write what you think, if you would be a poet, and pay no attention to anyone else." To write poetry inspires the writer toward the spiritual courage and sensitive response and uplifting that, in turn, inspire men and women and children toward humanity's

highest enthusiasms and aspirations and places just as to read poetry inspires the reader. Because "love grows by what it feeds on," to write poetry most splendidly increases, fosters, develops one of humanity's most sublime and splendid opportunities and loves.

Not to know, to love poetry, to "hate poetry" as many men and women, even book-loving men and women, believe that they do, is to be robbed and shorn of many dear and delicate, and brave and bright, and robust and regal pleasures. To "hate poetry," again in the opinion of Dunsany, tenderest, truest of poet-creators of fairies and fantasies and jade gods that come alive, is indeed to be unhappy and forlorn.

"It is to have no little dreams and fancies, no holy memories of golden days, to be unmoved by serene midsummer evenings or dawn over wild lands, singing or sunshine, little tales told by the fire a long time since, glowworms and brier rose; for of all these things and more is poetry made. It is to be cut off forever from the fellowship of great

men who are gone; to see men without their haloes and the world without its glory; to miss the meaning lurking behind common things, and elves hiding in flowers; it is to beat one's hands all day against the gates of fairyland and to find that they are shut and the country empty and the kings gone hence."

To love poetry, conversely, is to be made free of all the suggested sweets and splendors, not to say of many fine, high, and alluring secrets of the human heart. It is to be in tune with humanity's best and dearest and noblest glories, dreams, hopes, aspirations, impulses, and ardors. To write poetry—aye, even to write verse in the poetic spirit—is to have part and share in the creation of all these lavish hopes and ideals and wonders, to have new and keener perception and appreciation of all that is good and true and tender in our brother man.

To write poetry in the spirit in which poetry should be written, not because one hopes to sell the article made but because the song insists upon being sung, nay, upon



singing itself over and over in the core of the heart, the soul's most sacred places, is to play with the stars and the sun and the moon and the winds and the rain and the rivers of night and darkness. It is to string dull days with jewels, sad nights with sunbeams, to know the inmost meaning of love and death and terror, to feel joy's pulses beating high, joy's tide surging strongly within the quickened spirit, to be "made one with nature," in a pure, glad sense with nature's God.

Write poetry, again, because poetry writing, composition, making is the most natural, universal of human arts and graces. Children, in some kind and degree, all are poets. Children, child-souls, child-races all make poetry, verbally in the beginning, write it down as soon as they are able. For children are too close to the beginnings of life, to the sources of existence to be ashamed of primal desires and inclinations and passions, and their vivid, pure-rayed natures vibrate, always, to the music of the spheres.

For the adult poetry lover, the lover of rhyme and rhythm and verbal grace and

beauty, to follow even distantly in the footsteps of the little ones is to taste of the spring of eternal youth at will, at pleasure. For this, if for no other reason, poetry writing should become even more general than in the present day and generation, when practically everybody seems to be trying a more or less 'prentice hand on poetry. That the desire to write poetry nowadays is almost as universal as the desire for food and sleep and sunshine and free living the briefest, most surface reflection will suffice to show.

Men, perhaps, are a little more shy about public admission of poetic tendencies and productions than women, but at least five out of every ten men, tactfully interrogated, will admit occasional composition of "a little verse," and among women the verse-making percentage will be found much higher. A lecturer on poetry not long since said something like this before a gathering of about one hundred club women, members, incidentally, of the philosophy and science, *not* the art and literature department of one of America's largest and most flourishing and most



famous clubs. She was met by surprised and incredulous smiles.

"Will any woman present who has never written poetry please raise her hand?" the lecturer asked, intent upon supporting the moot statement and increasing the available supply of poetry-writing statistics.

Seven hands went up, three of them not too boldly.

"Will any woman present who has never tried to write poetry please raise her hand?" the lecturer persisted.

Only two hands were raised.

Poetry magazines have not, so far, been oversuccessful, financially speaking, in America, yet new magazines of such order from time to time essay devoted if precarious existence. And all of them achieve a more or less sympathetic and spacious circle of readers. New poetic societies, groups, and gatherings continually are in process of formation, which evidences indubitable popular interest in poetry. In schools, colleges, universities, poetry now is studied—not "dissected and vivisected" as a poetic enthusiast

once indignantly protested—with a fresh and eager interest seldom if ever manifest before.

Balancing such facts with the lame and halting nature of many of the poetic effusions produced and even published, there would seem to be fair field for a modest little treatise on *How to Write Poetry*, even though this same modest little treatise now and again may seem to partake of the nature of Punch's notorious matrimonial advice and injunction. For the quality of the ever widening flood of poetic endeavor surely might be improved by the timely taking of thought.

He who by smallest, most infinitesimal jot or tittle exalts the quality of the world's art is a true humanitarian and deserves passing well of his fellows. Write poetry, therefore, advancing superlative, altruistic reason, for sake of augmenting humanity's happy need of linguistic felicity and loveliness; to show the world, if you will, how the thing should be done, how it might be done if every sweet singer lived, always, up to highest standard.

But don't write poetry with the idea of founding a new school, a new system. There's no novelty in that sort of thing since "new" poets and poetic cults have become so numerous, and, really, the old schools and systems will last some time longer. Let them die, if they must, of euthanasia rather than untimely choking. Despite the impatient proclamations and inflammations and defamations of the ultra-modern poetizers, the old modes and manners have good wear in them yet.

And don't, necessarily, write poetry for publication. Why should you? Publish if you will and can, but don't write with one eye on your pocketbook and the other on a possible public. Good poetry, of course, should be sold and sold high. Poets live not by praise alone and the laborer is worthy of his hire. But don't think no poetry is good unless you can sell it, nor that, on the other hand, poetry becomes good so soon as it brings back money. Logically, actually, there's no connection between the two phenomena. Witness your own oft-repeated

complaint concerning "What poor stuff one finds in the magazines, nowadays!" and the historic knowledge that the world's greatest poets frequently have not been able to sell their poetry at all.

Moreover, it will be remembered, in such regard, that at least until the present era, few poets have been business successes, have attempted to live by their singing. And even the most popular of our contemporary minstrels help to keep the pot boiling by virtue of some other, more strictly utilitarian trade or profession. The majority of them are like the wise Chicago sculptress who taught dancing rather than dim the freshness of her artistic ability by too frequent bread and butter figurines and statues. Many members of the modern choir immortal preserve and observe traditional practice if not preaching by singing for the song's sake mainly—and selling their songs when they can.

(At this juncture the reader is exhorted to peruse anew the Kenyon Cox poem-creed on the title page of this study, with the Max Eastman quotation that follows. Nothing

could better express the spirit in which the writing of poetry, as any other form of artistic endeavor, should be undertaken, carried on.)

The Japanese, perhaps, have the best idea in regard to poetry writing, the making of poems. Certainly the Japanese idea, despite the studied care of its later practice, most nearly approaches the unstudied yet exquisite singing of those early poets of all races who sang as naturally as they spoke or leaped or ran or exercised any other of nature's unending possibilities of joyous expression; who felt not that singing, poetry making, was a special pleasure reserved for the few—though always the professional singer, the minstrel, the troubadour displayed it most fully, having proved his right to special poetic privilege in fair, free, and fullest public competition with his rivals—but that poetry making to some extent was the right and prerogative of all.

The Japanese, as, in some measure, the Chinese also, make poems upon all possible subjects and occasions. They sell them com-

paratively seldom, being content, in the main, to celebrate rather than commercialize pleasing ideas and fancies. But the educated Japanese or Chinese man or woman who could not make a poem—a real poem—upon instant notice would be deemed indeed a dull and inarticulate, not to say inartistic, creature. Yet the making of one of the quaint Japanese poems of from seventeen to thirty-four syllables, a feat common to practically all Japanese classes, is no mean trick, verbally speaking. The making of a Chinese poem, even of the odd and frequently disappointing “stop-short” variety, is a work of art before the mere craftsmanship of which the more indolent occidental would shrink and shudder, Chinese being a language of infinite and infinitely varied sounds, inflections and potentialities, with a demanded nicety of stress, accent, rhythm, and general linguistic finish not to be dreamed of in regard to any other tongue.

Why not write poetry, then, as do our oriental fellow-poets, for mere love of creating something beautiful, of handling delicate



and graphic and beautiful words, of making fine and charming ideas fall into beautiful patterns, of learning how better to appreciate the fine points of poetry in general? Why not write poetry as many a twice-happy person, artist in spirit if not always or altogether in performance, paints or composes or improvises or dances or recites or sings or acts or reads poetry to others? Such indulgence, like that of virtue, will be found "its own exceeding rich reward" and may lead to the wider audience, to publication, possibly to fame later. But what painter, what singer, what dancer, what musician, amateur or professional, expects to make capital out of every slightest exercise or pirouette or melody, anticipates the selling of every practice scale or song?

"Beautiful forms and compositions are not made by chance" was Ruskin's manner of saying that out of many artistic efforts but one or two may win way to perfection, "nor can they ever be made at small expense." True genius, of course, knows its own superiority to commonplace theories and condi-

tions, but as a rule it is a safe assumption that each rare and seemingly artless lark song or thrush threnody has been preceded by many a practice flight.

Much of the popular prejudice so long rampant against poets and poetry writing, the mean if minor martyrdom of popular contempt and half-humorous pity, has sprung from the marked if unconscious and innocent overconfidence and conceit prevalent on the part of the poets, the rhymesters, their naïve belief—frequently, indeed, amounting to conviction—that every poetic line must be worth noting, their premature eagerness to publish. The test of the public square, truly, always is the best and most real one, but the mistake of essaying it too soon or lightly, of offering crude or imperfect wares in the open market must be self-evident. Many and many a poet earlier might have attained the coveted fame, recognition had he been a little more deliberate about “hanging his verses in the wind” of public print.

Public attitude and opinion, on the other



hand, largely have been to blame for this mistaken poetic behavior. While the training, the preparation of students of other arts has been long and arduous, the poet has been left to work out his own salvation with only the rudimentary general training of the schools and colleges to guide him. The aspiring painter, actor, or musician, supplied with quite as good general training, expects to work on, alone or under highly specialized instruction, for long periods before daring to deem or dub himself artist. Why not, for the aspiring poet, similar period of probationary, precautionary tasks?

Amy Lowell, who certainly has striven long and hard in development of her poetic gift, is on record as believing that while "poetry should exist simply because it is created beauty," the poet must "learn his trade in the same manner and with the same painstaking care as the cabinet-maker"—not an unreasonable contention, surely, even if tending toward the extreme. Other poets, of varied order, have subscribed to such devotional if not reverential doctrine. Only by

patient schooling is the "cunning artificer" in whatever medium brought to be.

Considered from this viewpoint, this angle, the study of poetry writing—with, of course, books like *How to Write Poetry*—will be seen as right, reasonable, logical, legitimate, to be encouraged. Acceptance, adoption of such tenets cannot fail of good effect upon the poetry of the future, since by and through it better work will be turned out by many poetic strivers, who, if only because of the seriousness of their poetic attitude, inevitably will raise the general poetic standard. Meanwhile, of course, all the world will be writing poetry. But, let it here and now be proudly posited, why not?

Much mere verse will be written, naturally, as has been the case ever since the morning stars first sang together, with the birds and the winds and the waters for admiring, supporting chorus. But, again, why not, so long as the verse be of good, honest, intelligent quality and content? We cannot all be great poets, any more than we can all be great artists of any other order. But who, there-

fore, would refuse to any child of man the joy of being a skilled musician, of sketching prettily, of singing sweet old hymns and lullabies and ballads because grand-opera powers or the genius of color be lacking, be denied?

Verse may be, as a Jeffery Farnol character has it, "low as low," a thing of "Grub street or an attic" (though we all know, at heart, that it isn't), it may occupy but a modest station on the long, steep road to Parnassus, but at all events it points in the right direction, it keeps "its prow turned toward good" in the fine phrase of sweet Adelaide Proctor, it gives much pure and simple pleasure, it can but make for good in the heart and soul and nature. And the making of verse, to say nothing of poetry, is rich with joy-giving power as with Lethean consolation, strong with sweet comfort against sorrow, quick with uplifting solace for sad hearts and tired or troubled souls.

It frees from sordid scope and suggestion the spirit bound in chains by force of imprisoning circumstance, environment, suggestion.

It gives speech to the dumb, enables the timid, the inarticulate to voice the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that in colder, more circumscribed prose must lack relieving outlet of expression. It helps the voiceless dreamer to endow with wings of vitality the struggling, surging impulses, aims, and emotions that, otherwise, scarce could be whispered to God in the dark.

Reasons, cogent, logical, impressive, for the more general writing of poetry might be multiplied indefinitely. Here are but a few of the more obvious and simple. To every poetry-loving soul various others will suggest themselves readily. So why should not Mr. Everyman—aye, and his entire family—write poetry at will and pleasure, write poetry as a means rather than an end, it may be, as a poetic exercise more often than a polished performance without doubt.

Some of us, to paraphrase a saying intrinsically poetic, are born to poetry, some of us achieve it, some have it thrust upon us by the trend of the times, misdirected enthusiasm, or the artistic example of others. None can

be harmed and all may be helped by the endeavor, even by the faulty, the failing endeavor, to add to the world's poetic riches. Some, it is hoped, even from this humble, inadequate treatise may receive some slight poetic aid.

Not all the study of or practice in poetry writing imaginable will make of the lay poetry lover a true poet. Only God can create in such splendid fashion. But at least it can compass no hurt or wrong to follow in the footsteps of the true poets, and, should you happen to be one of their number in embryo, glad and high-hearted treading of the poetry trail may help you break out of the shell.

## SONG

“Oh! Love,” they said, “is King of Kings,  
And Triumph is his crown.  
Earth fades in flame before his wings,  
And Sun and Moon bow down.” —  
But that, I knew, would never do;  
And Heaven is all too high.  
So whenever I meet a Queen, I said,  
I will not catch her eye.

“Oh! Love,” they said, and “Love,” they  
said,  
“The gift of Love is this;  
A crown of thorns about thy head,  
And vinegar to thy kiss!” —  
But Tragedy is not for me;  
And I’m content to be gay.  
So whenever I spied a Tragic Lady,  
I went another way.

And so I never feared to see  
You wander down the street,

Or come across the fields to me  
On ordinary feet.  
For what they'd never told me of,  
And what I never knew;  
It was that all the time, my love,  
Love would be merely you.

—Rupert Brooke.



## CHAPTER II

### WE MUST HAVE A SKELETON

**T**RUE to the plan outlined in the preface, this little book will attempt no learned poetic disquisitions, will enter into no academic or anatomical discussions concerning the framework, the bony basis of that most plastic of arts and mediums, English poetry. Poetry must have a skeleton, a framework, of course, just as the human body, soft, graceful, pleasing, is built about a firm scaffolding of bone and sinew. But it is not the most beautiful of bodies which too clearly manifests its concern with this scaffolding. In the most beautiful of bodies, on the contrary, the shaping structure scarcely obtrudes itself at all.

And, too, so many, varied and interesting are the contemporary theories as to poetic construction that the task of elucidating the situation, granted anything less than the most



comprehensive of poetic studies—as the most courageous of students—would be overwhelming. We have, as Mr. C. E. Andrews aptly says, “stress theories, syllabic theories, quantitative theories, ‘long and short’ theories, ‘mono-pressure’ theories, ‘rhythm-wave’ theories, time part theories, historical theories” and many others. All have their sturdy and impassioned disciples and defenders, each of whom is magnificently sure of treading the only true path to the poetic Olympus. There is as little mutual charity, as a rule, among the ranks of the poetic disputants as between votaries of rival political systems or religious cults. “Metrists,” again to quote the apt Mr. Andrews, “hold to their prosodic prejudices with the tenacity of the old-time theologians, and scholars will die at the stake for a definition”—while English prosody itself is not too precise or authoritative. The din of eager, conflicting voices deafens the puzzled lay listener; many a poetic agnostic, if not atheist, has been made through too ardent and sonorous missionary-poetic work.

Each metrical student, therefore, is invited to find, follow, and if he choose, lay down his own special, particular, and favorite theory of versification. We shall concern ourselves alone with some of the simpler, less technical features and phenomena of poetry, attempt to assist the avowedly unschooled student—again as suggested by the preface—to get at the matter by spirit rather than by rote or letter. This method every day is proving itself more and more acceptable in regard to other training systems and studies. The Gradgrinds, of course, will think otherwise; will dissent, disagree, disapprove solemnly; but it is doubtful if the botanizing infant phenomenon, who glibly intrudes into the private life of the floral kingdom, ever loves the helpless blossoms dissected as does the child who grows up, trained only through gratified feeling for beauty, in a garden of flourishing flowers.

Upon one plank only of the many timbered poetic platform would it seem safe to rest in calm, reasonably sure of fairly general sympathy and acceptance. That plank may

be specified as the poetic theory, widely popularized by Sidney Lanier's *Science of English Verse*, subscribed to by many later poets, metrists, and prosodists, which bases the true rhythms of verse, as of music, upon equality of time elements or divisions. That maintains, in other words, what is consistently admitted by utterly inconsistent students and systems, that the appeal of poetry is auricular rather than ocular, that the "delicate art of hearing" is all-important to poetic composition and judgment, that initial poetic appeal must be made rather to the ear than to the eye.

This attitude has been and is more or less officially maintained by poetic devotees and interpreters who elsewhere have little in common. Underlying recognition of its claims may be detected in the work of many great and famous poets. The melodious strains of Tennyson, Swinburne, Noyes, and others of like genius really are verbal music; they might be—and sometimes are—enjoyed without slightest hint of their meaning, with but trivial appreciation of their imagery,

grace of diction, or even subject; and there is no doubt that many of the older poets quite frankly, if subconsciously, worked from this basis. Amy Lowell, to represent the poetic wing directly opposing that of the poets mentioned, says that, "Poetry is rather a spoken than a written art," thus admitting, despite the strongly intellectual nature of much of her own and her followers' poetry, the auricular appeal of Lanier's definition; and much of the most notable free verse of the ultra-modern school attains marked beauty through and because of the charming, if irregular, embodied rhythms, the musical ebb and flow of its lines.

The difference between fixed and free verse has been described as depending, for the first, upon rhythm, for the second, upon cadence; but the fact that these two words frequently are used with synonymous intent, while no two users, perhaps, attach just the same shade of meaning to them, limits their usefulness in present regard. However, at least partial proof of the truth and sense of the indicated theory would seem afforded

by the knowledge that the rhyme-word identical in spelling but not in sound is displeasing to the melodist even when the framing poem is read silently. The mind, the mental ear, recognizes the break in the music, and is shocked as the outward ear by a musical false quantity or note.

Blank verse, as free verse and "polyphonic prose," depends quite as much upon meter for harmonic effect as does its rhyming fellow, the meter, stress, accents, general scansion employed being merely of a different and sometimes more elastic order. Roughly speaking, the free verse forms or "patterns" may be compared to the chanted rune of the primitive troubadour or minstrel; rhyming poetry to the ballad form of wedded music and story, with its regular melodic phrasing and more strongly marked, recurrent, conventional accent. That the rhythmic, time-divisions quality or element is strongly felt by many poets in course of production is a matter of record. Tennyson and Poe both "worked aloud," as it were, pleasing the poetic ear, always, even if this meant sacri-

fice of a beautiful word or phrase or even idea. Scott and Browning found the rhythmic exercise of horseback riding conducive to poetic composition. Wordsworth pounded out his poems with his cane while tramping the Cumberland Hills much, perhaps, as Vachel Lindsay pounded out his swinging, clinging rhymes and rhythms while tramping America's great West.

"Poetry," says Ludwig Lewisohn, "like music is an act in time, and we are conscious of time only in dividing it. But our method of dividing time must reach consciousness through one of the senses, the sense of hearing. It must employ sounds, either single sounds or alternate sounds. And as soon as alternate sounds are differentiated to save them from the monotony that deadens the consciousness—such as the dripping of water or the ticking of a clock—we reach the immemorial method of stress and fall, that is of rhythm."

So universal, so intrinsic, so impressive is the appeal and effect of rhythm in poetry that a theory has been seriously postulated



placing the origin of poetry in the simple rhythmical calls and exclamations that distinguish alike tribal dances and other social expressions of various savage peoples and the concerted labors of primitive workers. The communal dances, martial, religious, emotional, whatever, of the savage always are accompanied by a kind of rhythmic vocalizing, half shout, half song, by nature closely akin to the rhythmic refrains or "chanteys" of soldiers, sailors, miners, et cetera. An interesting sidelight upon this prevailing primitive tendency was furnished by the Negro soldiers who so recently have proved their wartime virtue and valor. While marching, working, waiting for orders these Negro soldiers almost invariably sang or chanted together—usually repeating and reiterating a recurrent burden highly rhythmic but frequently lacking in meaning or consecutive sense. Little children, similarly, will croon or murmur half-formed songs and refrains over and over until they take to themselves more or less definite poetic shape.

Such facts and expressions are in direct

line with the "pattern theory" of poetic origin that regards the original idea of a poem as a sort of pattern in the maker's mind or consciousness, "an exact pattern," in the words of T. A. Goodell, "to which the reader approximates, now more closely, now less, as the poetic character of the words or the requirements of sense and expression permit or demand."

By the scansion or reading of a poem, the poem, as the poet, largely stands or falls, and that poet is most fortunate, as most popular, who best knows how to make his pattern, be this simple or elaborate, clear to the reader. When and where the rhythm fails of intended effect, the poem, the poet, fails also. Poe, whose verse patterns scarcely could be missed, believed "That rhythm is erroneous (at some point or other more or less obvious) which *any* ordinary reader can, without design, read improperly. It is the business of the poet so to construct his line that the intention *must* be caught *at once*."

Reflection will show that the more famous, as the most beloved poets have succeeded



admirably in this direction, a success shared by writers of popular songs and jingles from Mother Goose down—and, without invidious comparison of widely differing degrees of art, for practically the same reasons. George Cohan's "Over There," for example, could make no claim to be considered either real poetry or real music, but its strongly accented, rhythmical phrases, verbal and melodic, have fastened it irrevocably upon the memories and consciousness of many. Kipling, a rhythmic master, and who has been quoted as saying that once he has the "tune" of a new poem in mind the hardest part of the work of composition is over, attains, achieves his best effects in similar way.

Vachel Lindsay, who not only writes many poems to a sort of chanting measure but actually chants them in reading, is intensely rhythmic also. So is Alfred Noyes, whose "singing verse" is full of charm for the rhythm-loving reader, many of whose poems might be greatly enjoyed by such reader even though utterly ignorant of the English language. Certain modern poets of markedly

“new” order recently have returned to medieval methods and accompanied their spoken or intoned poems with stringed instruments. Others, reading their own poetry and that of others, by nods, gestures, and other mannerisms bear witness that the rhythmic response hoped and expected from the listener, the reader, has original impetus in themselves.

The difference between poetry of strongly marked rhythmic pattern or skeleton and rhythmic prose is not so great as might be imagined. Much of the strongly rhythmic free verse of Walt Whitman and Matthew Arnold and W. E. Henley might be read as prose and would differ from good prose only in the richer quality of its diction; much of Joseph Conrad’s fine prose, on the other hand, could with little effort be turned into good free verse. Christopher Morley, in this connection, says a piquantly illuminating word:

“The sensible man’s quarrel with the proponents of free verse is not that they write such good prose; not that they espouse the

natural rhythms of the rain, the brook, the wind-grieved tree; this is all to the best, even if as old as Solomon. It is that they affect to disdain the superlative harmonies of artifice and ordered rhythms; that knowing not a spondee from a tribrach they vapor about prosody, of which they know nothing, and imagine to be new what antedates the Upanishads. The haunting beauty of Walter de la Mare's delicate art springs from an ear of superlative tenderness and sophistication. The daintiest alternation of iambus and trochee is joined to the serpent's cunning in swiftly tripping dactyls. Probably this use of artifice is greatly unconscious, the meed of the trained musician; but let no singer think to upraise his voice before the Lord ere he master the axioms of prosody."

"Imagist journals please copy," Mr. Morley quaintly adds.

Max Eastman, on the contrary, would render "the axioms of prosody" unnecessary or at least of negligible importance. To his poetic understanding rhyme and rhythm, if not parts of the same impulse, at least are

most closely related. Poetry, to him, has less formal basis than that admitted by the personally informal author of "Shandygaff," "Rocking Horse Poems" and "Songs for a Little House."

"Remember that you are engendering and sustaining in the mind a flow of waves, and you will need no laws of prosody," says Mr. Eastman. "Remember also that the words, and groups of words, you work with, are not common names grown old in the conveyance of a meaning; they are surprising names, new-made by you, to choose fresh qualities and details in the things you speak of, and to join them in the mind with other things they never knew before, thus sending them alive and vivid into that stream of heightened consciousness the waves induce. You will need no laws of rhetoric. You will have knowledge of the act of writing poetry, and the surest path to its enjoyment."

"Rhyme reduplicates the metric pulse when feeling runs strong," says Mr. Eastman further, "as a dancing darkey begins to clap his hands with every so many clicks

of his flying feet. A similar reduplication may be, and has been, accomplished in poetry by other means, and means less difficult to the composer, but rhyme is probably the final best of them. Its exciting and hypnotic power was discovered by the Chinese, by the Persians, and Arabic poets, and doubtless independently by the late Latins in Europe. It is neither a conventional ornament, nor a mnemonic device, nor esoteric, nor ephemeral, in poetry. It is as native to a rhythm that flows high as whitecaps to the ocean."

Which suggestion, if no more highly rated, at least should give the scorner of standard poetic patterns reason for thought and pause.

Free verse, being independent of rhyme, gains or loses much by the kind and quality of its rhythm, as by the separate and usually capitalized lines that call attention to it. All of these points are much affected by the reading of the poem, which lends fresh and contributory emphasis to the time-divisions theory and basis. Good reading is to poetry what expression is to rendition of musical

compositions. The quality of the material remains unaffected by the rendition, but the rendition means much to the enjoyment, the comprehension, reaction of those who reproduce or hear.

Many a poet, it may be noted here, has done good work as the Molière character had talked and written prose, "all his life without knowing it." Technically ignorant of even the basic rules of poetic composition; blissfully unaware of "light" and "stressed" endings, of onomatopoeic effects and sibilants, of anapaests and amphibrachs, of the virtues and dangers of assonance and alliteration, of rough or vocalic sequences, of all the fine points and polished technicalities that distinguish skilled poetic craftsmen, they yet have achieved highest poetic effects and production. They have done this because the poetic impulse, intrinsic or reflective, surged strongly within them, because their natural feeling for poetic melody, tone-color, verbal music was exquisitely alive.

Cale Young Rice, though a finished poet, amazingly versatile and prolific, probably



would have sung tunefully without any poetic study or knowledge whatever. It is certain that Joyce Kilmer would—and probably did in the earlier stages of his all too brief but thoroughly poetic existence. And sweet, early dying Nora Chesson Hopper, and Francis Ledwidge, and Adelaide Crapsey and many another gifted young poet undoubtedly wrote much and beautifully without overmuch training or reflection. It goes without saying that many heroic participants in the swan-song chorus of the Great War sang rather with the heart than the intellect. Nevertheless, though the poetry-reading public thereby may have missed nothing, the poets unquestionably missed for this reason great and rare joy and tender in the conscious, reverent clothing of cherished thoughts, grave and deep or butterfly light and elusive, in just the right beautiful words.

“The poetry born of the war,” in the opinion of John Galsworthy, “is naturally one of the most permanent creations of the fighting period and will live in literature as of permanent artistic value.”

With "In Memoriam," and the *Rubâiyât of Omar Khayyám*, for example, their clothing forms now are indissolubly connected. Yet these forms were not original with Tennyson and Fitzgerald, but, chosen or self-choosing for the masterpieces indicated, by perfection of harmony and fitness became irrevocably wedded to them. For this cause they since have been barred to poets of lesser, later order, since who now might dare to essay them without danger of the imitative reproach?

Stress, to pass lightly to another matter of poetic-anatomical importance, is to poetry what accent is to music. Its proper use "comes natural" to some poets while others acquire it hardly. Loosely speaking, regular rhythms may be compared to regularly accented musical strains or compositions, rhythms less regular and conventional to the syncopated music capable of such good and bad results.

A false, an awkward, an unwarranted stress or accent, a badly balanced word or sequence offends the ear, the sensitive poetic



sense like an unjustifiable accent in music, a badly balanced picture, and with effects even more actively revolting than in the latter instance. Here, as with good poetic reading or scansion, the musical ear, the musical sense must give the poet, the poetic student, great aid.

It might almost be said, indeed, that without such ear, such sense, there could be no true poet. It certainly must be difficult to compose good poetry lacking such natural gift or inclination. But in regard to the poetic mechanisms of stress, meter, rhythm much may be done, as with the purely technical aspects of any art, any craft, by study and attention.

Given—and please, dear reader and fellow-lover of good poetry note this qualification carefully—given at least some saving, seedling hint and meed and quota of the true poetic ability, feeling and tone.

## TO A FIREFLY BY THE SEA

Little torch-bearer, alone with me in the  
night,

You cannot light the sea, nor I illumine life.  
They are too vast for us, they are too deep  
for us.

We glow with all our strength, but back the  
shadows sweep:

And after a while will come unshadowed  
Sleep.

Here on the rocks that take the turning tide;  
Here by the wide, lone waves and lonelier  
wastes of sky,

We keep our poet-watch, as patient poets  
should,

Questioning earth's commingled ill and good  
to us.

Yet little of them, or naught, have truly un-  
derstood.

Bright are the stars, and constellated thick.  
To you, so quick to flit along your flickering  
course,

They seem perhaps as glowing mates in other  
fields.

And all the knowledge I have gathered yields  
to me

Scarce more of the great mystery their won-  
der wields.

For the moon we are waiting—and behold  
Her ardent gold drifts up, her sail has caught  
the breeze

That blows all being through the Universe  
always.

So now, little light-keeper, you no more need  
nurse

Your gleam, for lo! she mounts, and sullen  
clouds disperse.

And I with aching thought may cease to burn,  
And humbly turn to rest—knowing no glow  
of mine

Can ever be so beauteous as have been to  
me

Your soft beams here beside the sea's elusive  
din:

For grief too oft has kindled me, and pain,  
and the world's sin.

—Cale Young Rice.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CLOTHING SUBSTANCE

**T**HEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, poetic authority, friend of Tennyson, Rossetti, and Swinburne, has defined poetry as "the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language." Which is but a technical and academic way of saying that poetry is human emotion fitly, sympathetically expressed.

Given the spirit of poetry—something to say and the ability to say it in poetic manner—remains, always, the necessity of clothing the impulse, the breath of life, with words, with visible, audible form. Of poetic forms, as of the human form divine, are infinite and ever increasing variations, yet with no necessary hint of sameness. As every human being has one nose, one mouth, two eyes, two ears, et cetera, yet few humans look even approximately alike; as there are

black, white, red, yellow, and brown human races, constituting physical homes for countless human souls containing each a spark of the divine material; so there are countless poetic shapes and vehicles from which the poet prospective may choose.

Frequently, of course, especially in regard to the poems that are born unbidden, that sing their own sweet burdens practically unassisted, the form chooses itself, some distinctive, distinguishing, decided lilt or line or characteristic cadence coming, unannounced, to fasten itself on the mind, the heart of the poet. In such case the thing is decided without and quite outside of the poet's will, interference, volition. But, again, a beautiful poetic idea may come to a poet with but slightest hint of the clothing form to follow. In any case the idea, the spirit, before it can be shared with other poetry-loving humans, must have a body, a form.

(The non-technical reader however, need not here prepare to lay the book aside, leave the entire discussion resignedly behind him. No technical disquisition on verse forms is

to follow. We are but considering the high lights, the general lines of poetic composition. It is steadily assumed and taken for granted that the primary, as the academic, student will go elsewhere.)

And, since a given poetic idea must have a form, honest and sympathetic fitting of form to idea means everything to the success or failure of the resultant creation. Many a poem presents example of "an absolutely beautiful soul in an absolutely wrong body," as Florence Barclay said in quite another connection. Although no hard and fast lines can be laid down in such regard, poetic form-fitting should be almost prayerfully considered. Unsuitable or inharmonious setting has wrenched from purposes of natural and lasting beauty many an admirable, delightful idea.

Other things being equal, the simpler the form, the plainer the language, the better. Poetic language should be carefully chosen; it need not be quite so direct, so strictly utilitarian as the language of the street corner, the business office, the study. Max Eastman



may be right in believing the essence of poetry to consist, more than in any other respect, in "the enjoyment of certain particles of emotion or address which are wholly foreign to the speech of ordinary communication;" he may be not only right but prophetic in declaring that "*The Ahs and Thous and the Forevermores* seem to be more universal in the language of realization than any other audible or visible thing." But, on the other hand, Wordsworth also was right when, as early as 1798, he said that the diction of English poetry must be reformed, recast in such diction as ordinary men use in their emotional crises, and that "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Oftentimes a great, a lovely, an attractive poetic incident, vision, fancy, may be all the stronger, more impressive, more charming for being clothed in extreme simplicity of speech.

For example, "A Pleasant Thought," by means of which Dorothy Keeley has neatly expressed a neat idea, made simple, vivid,



direct, and effective point of contact with the universal human consciousness, probably would have lost much by having elaborate or pretentious garment forced upon it. Most casual reading of the piquant little poem will show why.

It is very nice to know  
That I am made so neatly,  
And that my little skin and bones  
Cover me completely.  
For I should blush with very shame  
If, when I was athinking,  
My skin and bones should come undone  
And leave my thoughts ablinking  
And all naked in the light—  
Oh, I am very glad to feel  
My fastenings are tight.

Such pleasing and apparently unstudied harmony of phrasing, of shaping, of clothing the thought with form lends force and one-pointedness, to use an expressive East Indian term, to many a greater poem "new" and of the more conventional variety. When the thought is thus fitly embodied the effect

of the finished poem is like that of an appealing picture in a perfect frame.

Ideally, it stands to reason, a small idea should have small setting and vice versa. A good, a great idea now and then triumphs over unsuitable form as a beautiful body occasionally triumphs over unbecoming drapery, poor dressing, but this is setting a heavy handicap, asking much of the poetic soul so sadly hampered by its material housing. Once in a while, a cycle of blue moons, comes a poem, of whatever order, that scarce could be improved in respect of clothing. George Herbert's "Virtue," known and loved the world over for simple, suggestive sweetness, may be instanced. This poem gains in impression, effect alike from idea, phrasing, rhyme, rhythm, stress, meter, form, all features of its construction—though it is possible that the gentle Herbert, singing from spirit rather than intellect, may not have known how good and scholarly a piece of work he had so happily turned out.

Present rereading of this poem can harm no one, so, for sake of pressing home the

thought-clothing moral, the cherished jewel  
shall be honored here.

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright!

The bridal of the earth and sky—  
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;  
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave

Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,  
Thy root is ever in its grave,  
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,

A box where sweets compacted lie,  
My music shows ye have your closes  
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,

Like seasoned timber, never gives;  
But though the whole world turn to coal  
Then chiefly lives.

Not every good poem, of course, can attain such smoothly cumulative and flowing

construction, climb to such perfect climax. With some poems, indeed, such accomplishment, even in attempt, would be a mistake. But, whenever reasonably possible, constructive perfection should be sought and studied. "Virtue," it will be noticed, satisfies the intellectual desire for progressive thought, the artistic craving for delicate finish, no less than the emotional, sensuous hunger for musical rhythm and rhyme.

The chief reason for rhyme, it may here be suggested, lies in the satisfaction of this emotional, sensuous, romantic hunger. Unrhymed stanzas have their place; they have been used to good effect by many of the sterling English poets—Blake, Southey, Tennyson, et cetera—with and without employment of a recurrent refrain; more recent poets have not disdained effective use of the unrhymed stanza; but as a rule the unrhymed stanza, lacking the virtues of either fixed or free verse, proves disappointing. Genius, we know, makes its own rules, is not, broadly speaking, amenable to the rules of others. But the regular stanza, as a form at once

fixed and arbitrary, albeit quite optional with the poet, most frequently seems to need and demand its conventional complement of rhyme.

The four-lined stanza is, perhaps, the most popular of all the clothing forms open to poetic ideas, and this, no doubt, is true, at least in part, because of the comparative ease with which it may be handled, manipulated, molded. Two-line and three-line stanzas, usually rhymed, have been much used also, but they require more skilful treatment and are not so easily induced to produce effects equally pleasing. The short stanza, generally speaking, should close with a period, embody an entire thought or division of one, and it is difficult, without visible strain or undue repression, to ensure this within boundaries too sternly restricted. *Terza rima*, a "continuous form composed of pentameter tercets, with a quatrain for concluding stanza," mainly is distinguished, to English readers, by fact of being the form used in Dante's *Divina Commedia* though it has served the turns, in Eng-

lish, of Milton, Byron, Shelley (with certain modifications), William Morris, and Alfred Noyes.

The quatrain, to progress naturally along the path of poetic construction, probably, as has been suggested, may be reckoned first favorite with poets as an order. It may be employed with any length of line, from the "short," "common" and "long" meters of the old-fashioned hymnals to Tennyson's incomparable "In Memoriam" arrangement and the variously rhymed and accented forms of Noyes, Houseman, Kipling, and many other masters; from the simplest trochaics to the hexameter, heptameter, and pentameter modes used by the authorities noted. Five-line and six-line stanzas are not now as widely liked as the four-line stand-by. But Robert Herrick and his contemporaries loved to work in such media; they were oft approved by Rosetti and Swinburne, while Yeats and Noyes have employed them too.

The seven-line stanza has only been used, authentically, in the "rhyme royal," or, to cling to the original French term, the *chante*



*royale*, beginning with Chaucer and coming down, in occasional use, to Morris. The eight-line stanza, variously rhymed, was much liked by the Elizabethans, and enjoyed partial revival, in the nineteenth century, by Byron and Keats. It would seem to make but slight appeal to contemporary poets. The Spenserian stanza, invented for the *Faerie Queene* and consisting of nine iambic lines, eight pentameters concluded by an Alexandrine (hexameter) rhymed ababbcbcc, is highly wrought and, therefore, mainly useful for elaborately decorative writing. It may well be used—should the contemporary poet care to use it—for ornate narrative productions, each wide-flung stanza being adaptable to a separate scene or phase of the story; but for the simple, realistic, intellectual, or impressionistic themes most popular at present it would prove unsuitable indeed.

Of these various stanzas, as of the sonnet, ode, blank verse, heroic and other couplets, to many of which forms the indicated stanzas lead and with all of which they may

be said to be in key or harmony, no examples need here be given. Most of the verse forms indicated are too well known to require recalling to the memory. A little wider latitude, however, may be allowed in consideration of certain less commonplace yet poetically popular modes originally derived from the French.

Of these a number, including the ballade, the rondel, the rondeau, the triolet, the villanelle, and the sestina, have been more or less effectively naturalized in England and America. The majority of them, born in medieval Provence, were popular with French poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Chaucer, whom Amy Lowell calls "the most modern of poets," claiming that he "did what the poets of the present are trying to do," Gower and other contemporaneous English poets worked in and with these forms but could not make them popular in English, despite the similarity then prevailing in regard to French and English laws of rhyme. In the seventies Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson, W. E. Henley and



Edmund Gosse perhaps more successfully experimented with these poetic modes, and still later young poets in England and the United States have made varyingly successful attempts.

Swinburne's famous "A Ballad of Dream-land," taking the ballad under consideration, has been called "the most musical ballad in English." It shall herewith be set forth as most effective argument in favor of this just and interesting contention. The case, so tried, will go by acclamation and delight.

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,  
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;  
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,  
Under the roses I hid my heart.  
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,  
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?  
What made sleep flutter its wings and part?  
Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,  
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;

Lie still, for the wind on the warm sea dozes,  
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.  
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's  
wound smart?

Does the fang still fret thee of hope de-  
ferred?

What bids the lids of thy sleep dispart?  
Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,  
It never was writ in the traveller's chart,  
And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows  
is,

It never was sold in the merchant's mart.  
The swallows of dreams through its dim  
fields dart,  
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops  
heard;

No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,  
Only the song of a secret bird.

#### ENVOY

In the world of dreams I have chosen my  
part,  
To sleep for a season and hear no word

Of true love's truth or of light love's art,  
Only the song of a secret bird.

Swinburne's "Ballad of François Villon, Prince of all Ballad-Makers," Andrew Lang's "To Theocritus in Winter," and Alfred Noyes' lovely "A Triple Ballad of Old Japan" offer marked and charming ballad examples which the poet prospective is urged to study at leisure. The *chante royale*, which Edmund Gosse defined as "the *ne plus ultra* of legitimate difficulty in the construction of a poem," is a development of the ballad. It has been mainly used by French poets for high and dignified themes.

The rondel, rondeau, and roundel are closely allied forms distinguished only in modern usage. The rondel has thirteen lines with two rhymes and a recurrent refrain. The rondeau has thirteen lines divided into three stanzas, boasts three rhymes and has an unrhymed refrain after the eighth and thirteenth lines. The roundel, apparently peculiar to Swinburne, uses the first word of the first half of the opening line for refrain,

but it differs from the rondeau in rhyming the refrain with the second line of the poem. Austin Dobson's "The Wanderer" is a fine example of the rondel.

Love comes back to his vacant dwelling, —  
The old, old Love that we knew of yore!  
We see him stand by the open door,  
With his great eyes sad, and his bosom  
swelling.

He makes as though in our arms repelling,  
He fain would lie as he lay before; —  
Love comes back to his vacant dwelling, —  
The old, old Love that we knew of yore!

Ah, who shall help us from over-telling,  
That sweet forgotten, forbidden lore!  
E'en as we doubt in our hearts once more,  
With a rush of tears to our eyelids welling,  
Love comes back to his vacant dwelling.

Good recent exemplification of the rondeau form is provided by Lyon Mearson's "Rondeau of Any Soldier."

When I come home from Flanders' field,  
From Flanders' field, from Flanders' field,  
I'll know the taste of everyday,  
The little things we do and say,  
The joys an even life can yield,  
What potent peace a day can wield,  
For I have dreamed on Flanders' field  
Of grace-notes in Life's scale to play  
When I come home.

I've seen the thrush grow mute and sealed  
On Flanders' field, on Flanders' field,  
For War does smaller things dismay;  
I want to live Life's common way,  
I'll know the secret War revealed  
When I come home.

Mr. Mearson, incidentally, has worked out interesting examples of the rondeau which turns upon a pun and which, in Mr. Mearson's opinion, constitutes "the real function of this old form." By many, however, the rondeau has become practically wedded, at least by more frequent usage, to romantic or sentimental ideas.

Let us, for roundel exhibit, hie us back to Swinburne. Here is a charming roundel expression from "The Way of the Wind."

The wind's way in the deep sky's hollow  
None may measure, as none can say  
How the heart in her shows the swallow  
    The wind's way.

Hope nor fear can avail to stay  
Waves that whiten on wrecks that wallow,  
Times and seasons that wane and slay.

Live and love, till the strong night swallow  
Thought and hope and the red last ray,  
Swim the waters of years that follow  
    The wind's way.

And let us give thanks to Dobson for good exposition of the triolet form.

Rose kissed me today.  
    Will she kiss me tomorrow?  
Let it be as it may,  
Rose kissed me today.

But the pleasure gives way  
To a savor of sorrow;—  
Rose kissed me today,—  
*Will* she kiss me tomorrow?

The triolet, like good golf, looks easy but proves less easy than it looks upon attempting. Marguerite Wilkinson regards the triolet as “simply a rhythmical echo of pretty, whimsical, personal emotion,” but the triolet form, though mainly used now for lightest of light verse, “society” or sentimental, was seriously employed by the Old French poets and occasionally, even in this brisk twentieth-century era, has yielded good serious results. As will be noticed, the triolet has eight lines, with the first and second repeated twice, and with the second line used again as the last. The fifth and sixth lines offer tempting opportunity for a climax, which explains the popularity of the triolet as a medium for humorous, witty, or graceful ideas.

For the villanelle, composed of nineteen lines—five three-line stanzas and an envoy



—this form employs two rhymes, arranged aba for the stanza and abaa for the envoy. The first and second lines of the first stanza are used for the refrain; they alternate as the third line of each successive stanza and finally complete the envoy as a couplet. W. E. Henley's "A Dainty Thing's the Villanelle," while far indeed from the kind of poetic production popularly associated with this brilliant, sardonic writer, is one of the best, daintiest, and most satisfying examples of villanelle compositions to be found in the modern poetry lists.

A dainty thing's the Villanelle  
Sly, musical, a jewel in rhyme,  
It serves its purpose passing well.

A double-clappered silver bell  
That must be made to clink in chime,  
A dainty thing's the Villanelle;

And if you wish to flute a spell,  
Or ask a meeting 'neath the lime,  
It serves its purpose passing well.



You must not ask of it the swell  
Of organs grandiose and sublime—  
A dainty thing's the Villanelle;

And filled with sweetness, as a shell  
Is filled with sound, and launched in time,  
It serves its purpose passing well.

Still fair to see and good to smell  
As in the quaintness of its prime,  
A dainty thing's the Villanelle,  
It serves its purpose passing well.

The sestina, to complete the count of French verse forms sufficiently used to demand present inclusion, has six stanzas of six lines each. It ends with a tercet. The six end words of the first stanza must be repeated, in fixed but varying order, in each stanza. The sestina, invented by that ingenious old troubadour, Arnaut Daniel, now, because of its distinguished and distinguishing development by Petrarch and Dante, is considered rather an Italian than a French form. It is equally difficult to produce, with

success, in any language, though Swinburne and Kipling each have used the sestina form to advantage. It is not, in any case, a form to be recommended to those unversed in poetic expression, save, perhaps, as a stimulating exercise, and even for the most skilful artist more than occasional use will fail to repay the necessary effort of production. The sestina, in fact, may serve as well as any other instrument for impressing the moral that, alike for amateur and professional poets, the simplest form usually will be found most effective and fine.

Free verse forms, as rarely reducible to known or generally acknowledged poetic rules and regulations, represent the direct antithesis of the highly finished and specialized verse forms just considered, the poetic wing most strongly opposed to their classic regularity and correctness. Free verse takes to itself, upon occasion, forms sharply defined and distinctive as unusual. But, at least to the perception of the ordinary poetic reader and student, it makes its own rules, is a law — the only law — unto itself, its votaries, its

creators. Because of the untrammelled laws of life and creation preferred, exemplified by free verse enthusiasts and followers the forms chosen as thought-molds by the leading free verse exponents are difficult of classification, analysis. Free verse, therefore, most naturally receives attention in connection with manner rather than form.

## THE NEW WORLD

I am the voice of your city  
Calling to you for help.

I am in peril.

For the war and its cause  
I gave men and money and workers,  
And sacrifices of food and warmth  
As was my part.

The war is won.

Now may I make my cry.

Alas! My hope of beauty is gone from me!  
A black pall of smoke is falling about me.  
Shall my danger be forgotten?  
Shall I be left to choke and strangle  
In an endless night?

The world cried out at the destruction  
Of the old dignity and beauty of Reims.

(Deep in my heart I hoped that in some  
future

I might have a beauty of my own.)  
The world cried out at injuries done  
To innocent Belgian children.

(Deep in my heart I prayed that mine  
Might be wholesome under their home sky.)  
These hopes are crying aloud to you.

What boots it to widen streets,  
To build bridges, and white façades  
To bury them in smoke?  
Can children grow to manhood in streets  
Where no sun can penetrate?  
And their lungs are black with grime?

The workers are coming back.  
The women who have given themselves are  
set free.

There is money left.  
There are kindly men, and wise and strong.  
I summon them all to rescue me!  
To make me worthy of that new world  
For which I gave them, and for which they  
fought.

Make me beautiful, and clean.  
Give me back God's sky.  
Take away this choking curse of smoke.  
— Frances Shaw.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

**W**HAT flesh is to the anatomical structure, what clothing is to the body, such stands the relation of style to subject, of manner of expression to the indwelling spirit which alone differentiates true poetry from mere verse.

As a skeleton, however perfect, must be fitly fleshed to achieve highest ideals of beauty, so an idea, however beautiful, must be fitly expressed to achieve fair chance in a world so full of lovely and charmingly expressed ideas, thoughts, and fancies. That style, for this reason, must be of real importance to subject, must serve the pure purposes of the indwelling spirit if this spirit is to attain justice, must be evident even to the poetically blind.

“Though I think like Sophocles or dream like Swinburne, what shall it profit when I

certainly cannot write like them?" pertinently asks the wise anonymous writer of an illuminating essay, "About Writing Poetry," published in the January, 1919, issue of *Harper's Magazine*.

"All strong emotion," in the suggestive verdict of Ellen Burns Sherman, "is self-authenticating and lops verbiage, till the throb of the writer's heart beats the rhythm of his measures."

The verity of this statement, undoubtedly, explains why so many magnificent messages have been given to the world through the medium of poetry. The throbbing of the writers' hearts, aided by or, on the contrary, transcending mere verbal organ of delivery, beats out the measure of their soul strivings just as many a minor musician and versifier beats out, with foot or fingers, the sustaining measure of his song.

The birth of an idea, of any kind, must mean a great moment to the human being consciously giving birth to it, the birth of an idea representing a distinct onward step in humanity's progress. Sometimes, of course,



great moments pass by unrecognized, unrealized, unheralded; sometimes human beings are too modest or too intrinsically great properly to evaluate their own intellectual, emotional products. But ideas, none the less, are scarce enough to be epoch making to the individual honored by their temporary residence. Which is but another way of saying that when a poetic idea comes to life in the mind, the soul of any child of humanity, when an idea demands or is considered worthy of poetic clothing, expression, the linguistic garment should be as carefully considered, as harmonious, as perfect as may be.

Granted, then, the right of a poetic idea to the form most closely approximating the perfect in that special regard, comes, again, the crucial test of style or manner. Poetic form chosen, how best, by means of sympathetic language, pour into that form, that mold, the thing that so richly deserves saying? Style and spirit being so closely akin, or so utterly, destructively at variance, on their good or bad union depend all the glad possibilities of a good marriage, the disappoint-

ing distresses of a poor one. Imagine the flowing free verse of Matthew Arnold, of William Blake, or Walt Whitman attuned to tripping trochaics or tortured into the duple-triple rhymes and rhythms so effective, harmonious in other connection! Or think, before lightly acclaiming this mighty matter of style and subject, of countless lovely, singing lyrics bereft of their musical lines.

The lesson of style, of suiting style to subject, subordinating bodily expression to the indwelling spirit that means, that makes a poem, like all other forms of art is best learned from a combination of feeling and study, receives vivid educational pointing from full, free, reverent but not imitative familiarity with the works of poetic masters. There are poems, as previously has been suggested, as naturally, inevitably cast in a certain mold, destined to a certain manner of expression as though poured into such mold, through such manner, straight from the urn of the Muses. There are others that would have been better recast in the pouring. There are poems distinguished by such per-

fect harmony of matter and material as to admit of no possible improvement. There are other poems, sometimes great poems, concerning which improving changes surely might be made.

Always this moot matter of poetic style, of expressing spirit in substance, has rent poetic camps, occupied the attention of poetic enthusiasts, students. Voltaire's fervent declaration that literature has benefited by the quarrels of authors perhaps has been especially true in regard to the literature known as poetic. The discussion as to the respective merits and virtues of various manners indubitably began with the first human minstrel's jealous or technical interest in his earliest rival. It is possible, or at least imaginable, that when the morning stars first sang together different parts of the "spacious universe" were at variance as to the harmonic values of given parts of the chorus. Recent arguments as to "conventional" or "free verse" modes and manners are but echoes of the old-time poetic arguments and eloquence rekeyed to contemporary note.

Briefs for and against the fixed-form manner as classic, stabilizing, dignified, or crusty with rigid and outgrown limitations, for and against free verse as humanly, artistically flexible, inchoate, rich in expressive scope and opportunity or a mere refuge for the indolent alike are as old as the ages. Recurrent popularity of a certain kind of poetic expression, of spirit-styling, is followed by an inevitable, inescapable reaction to the other. The poetic quarrel often bids fair to deafen the non-disputatious bystander, to disgust the disinterested or careless, but the fact remains that no definite law can be laid down, *ex cathedra*, in this eager and oft-renewed battle, because there is, there can be no poetic Vatican, no court of final resort.

Each of the contestants is right at some times, in some places. Poetic diction is open to almost as many opportunities of effective variation as the weather, "and all of them good" as in the cheery old countryman's serene and faithful acceptance. All imaginable diversities of poetic style and media are needed to express, interpret unending, ever-

changing, ever-growing varieties and variations of human, poetic thought.

Free verse undoubtedly has served, in some cases, as an excuse for laziness, for evading the stern, high task of finishing a piece of work, an artistic production in best possible manner. Fixed poetic forms undoubtedly, in some instances, have conduced to monotony, dullness, lack of piquant appeal and expression. Both, with equal justice, may be accused of having fostered the making of mere verse rather than poetry, the turning out of much mediocre craft-effort. But this is no more to the discredit of either than the turning out of poor or soulless creations is to the discredit of the paint tube, the violin bow, or the carpenter's chisel. Personal skill and taste are at fault.

"The poet's aim," it has been well said, "is always the immediate transmission of experience into art." Miss Lowell, herself conversant with the greatest in all worth while and serious schools of poetry, is right, if not highly original, in asserting that "poetry is an art, and great poetry is a

supreme art." To restrict any branch of art to any single medium of expression would be manifestly unreasonable and foolish. Why, since each recurring season of the year has its own special charms, advantages, beauties, deny to any one its own peculiar right and place?

And, in addition to the diverse necessities of human thought-production much must depend, in the matter of poetic output, upon the thought-jewel to be provided with setting, the kind of setting best suited for that particular gem. The basic idea for a poem really is but poem material; to attain its destined beauty it must be developed, polished, perfected generally. If for no other reason the poetic beginner, admitting fullest catholicity of poetic thought and purpose, will do well — while becoming as conversant as may be with all known forms of poetic expression — to cling rather closely, at least until the poetic wings have developed beyond mere pinfeathers, to the more classic, conventional modes and manners. Granted that the inner call to less standardized forms be not absolutely



irresistible, his chances of consequent success will be greatly increased.

A sonnet may not be too easy to manage, a quatrain may offer infinite opportunities of mistake, perhaps of conscious or unconscious imitation; but either, as a rule, will prove easier of successful handling than the uncharted, if accurately measured, cadences of Miss Lowell, the color-rhapsodies of John Gould Fletcher, the quaint psychology of Edgar Lee Masters, the quainter phraseology of Ezra Pound. Moreover the beginning poet is prone, strive as he may in opposite direction, for love and reverence of a given high example to attempt similar craftsmanship under unwarranted conditions. And no sartorial misfit, no second-hand garment is so pitiably unbecoming or degraded as a poetic drapery unsuitably applied.

Whitman's free verse, for example, be it reckoned as poetry or "impassioned prose," has a rhythmic sweep, a majesty that appeals to both senses and spirit. But the Whitman free verse poems not only are difficult of effective duplication but in manner are highly



unsuited to less impressive ideas. So, too, with the Tennysonian flow of "Launcelot and Elaine," the distinctive shaping and phrasing that lend inimitable character and charm to such unrhymed poems as Arnold's "Philomela," Henley's "Hawthorne and Lavender," Masters' "Spoon River Anthology" or many of the finest examples of Carl Sandburg or Robert Frost.

No argument is offered, of course, in favor of limiting the efforts of young poets to mere hackneyed forms and measures. Nothing could be further from poetic reason or justice. The suggestion merely is advanced that with poetic writing, as with all arts and crafts, simple, classic forms usually are the best with which to begin.

Nor need the striving poetic Muse be cramped or hampered by early, temporary adherence to poetic forms hallowed by long centuries of beautiful production. Classic forms—as the free verse forms also—provide chance and scope for the freest, most untrammelled of poetic fancies, outpourings, expression. No single school of poetry has

monopoly in this direction. The favorite and frequently expressed theory of the *vers libristes*, to the effect that greater freedom of form permits greater opportunity for rhythmic effects intrinsically expressive because unbound by conventional rules and regulations, has not, it would seem, received conclusive factual support. The work of the "newer" poets, the *vers libristes*, abounds in strong and fine example of rhythmic phrasing and depictive language. But examples quite as strong and fine may be found, in equal abundance, in the works of the most distinctively "melodic" of the poet choir.

The tone color and directly interpretative possibilities also warmly advanced in favor of free verse are, again, by no means peculiar to this form of poetic production. And the danger of free verse, especially for the comparatively untried poet, lies in the temptation and tendency to follow the line of least resistance, to allow the thing attempted to degenerate, deteriorate, to fail of highest possibility because of the supposed freedom from all limiting restrictions. Better than

this evil the opposing alternative of too careful and polished diction, too strict devotion to form.

And, too, in this matter of first aid to poetic form-fitting, of providing channel for the indwelling spirit of the poem to reach outward eye and ear, something, aye, much, must depend upon the way in which the unclothed idea has come into being. Some poets—real poets—deliberately choose an idea, as deliberately select the form in which they choose to express it, as deliberately compose, “smooth out,” polish the completed production. Others are fired by some mighty impulse of love or charity or human sympathy or wrath or sociological, humanitarian ardor. These, usually, make poems only when moved by the “divine afflatus,” and find the work of composition well under way by the time they sit down to the task of actual writing. Many of the world’s greatest poems have been written in this manner. Some poets, indeed, declare that the basic thoughts for their most successful poems have come to them full-blown, that they play the

part of amanuensis, spokesman more nearly than any other, at least in so far as the vital part of the resultant poem is concerned.

Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal" was written between sun and sun. Several of Browning's most impressive poems were put on paper almost as rapidly as might have been a casual letter. Jessie B. Rittenhouse, to instance a contemporary singer who sometimes has been accused of almost too carefully carving and polishing her exquisite little poems, says that in reality they come to her, practically as printed, on the street, as she waits for a friend, in all sorts of unexpected ways and times and places, and that her highest successes are those in which she scarcely finds it necessary to change a word or a line. On the other hand that exquisite singer, Sara Teasdale, carries her beautiful poems about with her, mentally and spiritually, sometimes for long periods before they reach the stage in which they may be committed to paper, shaping, polishing, perfecting line by line.

The anonymous writer of the fascinating

magazine article already mentioned, a writer said, under his own name, to be familiar to the ordinarily cultured reader, "who on more than one occasion has seen it signed to verse and prose of peculiar distinction," gives an interesting description of the way poetic composition begins with him. The description, the more interesting because reproducing the poetic experience, the compositive psychology of many, shall be repeated here.

"Have you never developed pictures in the dark-room, and watched the image form upon the film? You know how first the high lights appear, a touch here and a mass there and an outline yonder, separately and nothing like a picture; then gradually the space between fills into a design wherein the first intense bits have their places; and then the shadows and fine details come last of all. And you know how sometimes one picture never will come wholly clear, or another flashes forth too quickly, only to fade away again; and the result in either case is the same—a flat, dull, foggy thing with all its values wrong. So that your whole work is

to bring each image to its best and fit it there, not spoiling force in refinement nor detail for the sake of intensity. Well, it is exactly like that. I have beforehand the idea, the vision of what the thing is meant to be—a plan of rhythm and thought and the tone or feeling of it all. So I sit down and make a dark-room of myself, shutting out every other light except the red glow of imagination. Then come first the high lights, a phrase in one place, a line or sentence in another, and again some cadence or movement of the verse—as casually and as much without construction or control of mine as the scattered markings on the film. I recognize them by their places in the plan, and I try hard to hold them there until I can fill in the connection and bring all into form and harmony; and that is sheer technical labor. These high lights are the important parts in the sense of being climaxes or openings or endings, dominant rhyme-words or essential essences that must be just so, and upon which the rest depends; important also in that I do not and cannot make them—they happen, as if I re-



membered them; or they refuse to happen, as if I could not remember; but of course in the completed work no more important than the half-tones and organism of the design which I myself must make. And sometimes I have only the lights, and cannot for the life of me fill in the rest; and sometimes the whole image flares and fades, and the lights get lost in the shadows, and the work dulls into a vile, flat mockery of what I meant to do. And—only sometimes—there are lucky days when thought and mood and movement fit themselves into form at once, so that I have hardly more than to write down words as if I were taking dictation in a dream.”

This writer, who believes that “the better part of everybody’s daily brain work is intuitive or subconscious,” also believes that “inspiration of itself is nothing—mere day-dreams of no use unrealized; and between them and their realization lies all that a man may compass of labor and honesty and hoarded skill.”

This is why, to the thoughtful poet quoted,



technique means "the one supremely interesting thing to toil and talk about; not because the execution matters so much itself as the design, but because ideas happen whereas their embodiment must be made."

"Art here," it is aptly added, "is in no special category. The scientist groping for material law, the engineer scheming some new structure, the statesman ordering the affairs of men, merchant or tinker or soldier, or whom you will—all have their share in the one sacred fire; they must all alike learn and agonize to forge therein any achieved event of earth use; and I cannot see why the artist need claim exemption from the study and practice of his proper trade."

It is interesting to note that many vigorous poets, ancient and modern, have reported flashes of poetic inspiration similar to those described by this man of books in the long paragraph given, and that they, too, though with no thought of choosing or changing the form already indicated, have toiled and agonized to preserve and clothe such inspiration as it should be, to render to the indwelling

spirit of the poem all care and reverence due. Technique with them, as with the poet-scholar just quoted, has meant striving after perfect interpretation rather than insistence upon creation. Browning's "How We Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," for one notable example, came to him almost whole and instantly, line for line, measure for measure, on the ocean, out of a clear sky.

And here—in recalling that in such instances poets frequently have found inspiration practically like "striving to remember"—is but another way of sharpening the point so oft reiterated in present connection—that style must be the servant of subject, always, that the correlation of material and manner must be as nearly perfect, as harmonious as possible. That mode, that style, is best suited to a poetic idea which impresses the reader, the hearer, with the inevitable nature of the union, in regard to which it would be difficult to suggest improving alterations. That mode, that style, is unsuited which impresses the reader, the hearer, with the feeling that it leaves room for improve-

ment. And there are countless striking examples of both well and ill-fitting poetic clothes.

The thing, then, for the poet who would say his say in the best possible manner is to be sure that it *is* the best possible manner for the particular piece of work under consideration, to keep the personal self out of the work as much as may be. The conscious poetic stylist, as the conscious stylist of any order, risks losing a great good to obtain a lesser benefit. The poetic style cultivated for the sake of style will prove as unsatisfactory, in the long run, as the musical selection sacrificing soul for mere technical pyrotechnics. In poetry, of all arts, the spirit, the soul must reign paramount, far above all else.

And the poet who would be and attain his best, who would keep his lyre always in tune and in condition to render forth its noblest music, must keep his higher nature open to inspirations, to impressions of beauty, of harmony, of good and sympathy and regnant right. He must "polish his windows" assiduously, keep them unfailingly "open

toward Jerusalem," in order that no gleam of heavenly light, no glimmer of the shining stars, the rising sun, the spark divine be lost or missed or wasted. He must remember, as unfailingly, that "all great art is nothing but what, in the long run, continues to please many people." He must keep himself continually conversant with the best of all life, all literature, in all ways, all manners; he must do his untiring, unending best to bring out the light that is in him, the noblest within his power. And at risk of being reminded that poetry is a thing apart from morality, or unmorality, as such, it must be suggested that the best poetry springs, beyond question, from "a clear head and a clean heart," and that the greatest of poems mainly have been altruistic in tenor. Few really great poems have been written by poets of poor moral fiber, or by poets who have lived from their race apart.

The poet who would write really great poetry, who would solve the crucial problem of suiting style to subject, of providing proper avenues of expression for the in-

dwelling spirit of poetry, really must be "in tune with the infinite," in sympathy—or at least in sympathetic comprehension—with all varieties and variations of life as he knows and sees and shares it, in "perfect charity with all men," in the words of the good old spiritual mandate, unless, indeed, righteous indignation move him to attempt, through poetic protestation, the setting right of some unquestioned evil or wrong.

Poets so poetizing, as artists of any kind working honestly "for the work's sake," as for sake of the best and highest good of all humanity, will find many vexed stylistic and technical problems practically self-solving, especially if the general rule be followed of choosing the simplest style available whenever choice offers. Styles of many kinds, forms of many kinds, the work of many poets, must be studied—perhaps tried—for purposes of poetic culture; personal productions, in every case, must be as finely finished as possible. Conscience and intellect are no less necessary than soul and emotion in the making of real poetry.

But—and this thought is veracious as comforting!—if the heart be right, the indwelling spirit be served in the spirit of pure and reverent devotion, the style, granted foundation of the poetic gift in any degree worth noting, will take care of itself.

## MARKET

I went to Market yesterday,  
And it is like a Fair  
Of everything you'd like to see;  
But nothing live is there:  
—The Pigeons, hanging up to eat;  
And Rabbits, by their little feet!—  
And no one seemed to care.

And there were Fishes out in rows,  
Bright ones of every kind;  
Some were pink, and silver too;  
But all of them were blind.  
Yes, everything you'd like to touch.—  
It would not make you happy much,  
But no one seemed to mind.

And loveliest of all, a Deer!—  
Only its eyes were blurred;  
And hanging by it, very near,  
A beautiful great Bird.



So I could smooth his feathers through,  
And kiss them, very softly, too:

But Oh, he never stirred!

—Josephine Preston Peabody.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT OF THE POET

**T**HE education of a poet, to generalize before getting down to details, should be as general and generous as possible. His training should be correspondingly thorough and should include at least as much preliminary work and practice time as would be deemed necessary by the musician, the painter, or any other artist acquiring the elements of his profession, his special trade technique. The poet's equipment should include everything possible save, perhaps, a rhyming dictionary and poetic license. Albeit, to joke a little, semi-seriously, the necessity of acquiring duly numbered and registered license, attesting due and proper qualifications, before acquiring right to the public practice of poetry would save the world from many pathetic inflictions, save many a poetic

but none the less poignant heartache, save to many a poet his prematurely delivered song.

As to the rhyming dictionary—more later! Tools so often being confused with production, imitation with creation, the rhyming dictionary habit will be more honored in the breach than by observance. Its support is questionable at best.

Let us begin, then, so much being accepted, with the poet's specific education, his special preparation for that station of life and literature to which he believes the god of poetry has called him. This, as has been hinted, should include every possible subject and phase and feature and department and division of the world's knowledge, experience, and attainments. Since he is to be free of the world's best company, open to all imaginable influences and opportunities, liable, at any moment, any moment's notice, to lack power or be the more impressive, effective for some seemingly casual hint or idea or allusion, the poet should be fit to associate with such company, able to respond at will, at need, to each and all of the influences

noted. There have been poets, of course, who knew little of books or humans, just as there have been artists ignorant of pictures or even of nature, cooks unable to give chapter and verse for the recipes basing their acknowledged successes. But such cases are exceptions, merely—merely, as is the rule with regard to exceptions, further impressing, enforcing the rule.

Nor should the poet's education be that of books only. He should know nature, all sister arts in some degree, all fields of science in so far as possible, all branches of his brother man's endeavor to greatest possible extent. He should realize the trend and taste, if not the psychology, of all human emotions; he should comprehend them all, subjectively, whether of pleasing or repellent order, be quick in responsive reaction. Better that a poet should be slow of intellect, though this, of course, is regrettable, than that he should fail to feel.

And as with the emotional nature, so, too, with the moral, the spiritual sides of human life and living. Poetry, of course, as all art,

is a thing at least technically apart from morality, while morality, equally of course, largely varies with times and ideas and periods and conventions. But, other things being equal, the "good" man, the man who strives to do and be his best under all circumstances and in all conditions, the man who leads a moral life according to conventional standards, will be the better poet. Again there have been exceptions, exceptions of such meteor-like brilliance and wonder as to claim more than their just and actual value, but, yet again, main-traveled experience clearly indicates that the high, brave, uplifting emotions and impulses make for the best in art—as in life, which art serves, which it follows, and which it should also lead and inspire; that the best, most manly men, the best, most womanly women, have been the best and most manly, womanly of poets. This is true in a double sense, moreover, since all true art is asexual in character and must combine the nature, virtues, and attributes of both halves of the human race.

The poet, as Bret Harte well expressed it,

"is man and woman and child, all three," aye, and all other forms of life over-above and into the bargain. Only as the poet is "made one with nature," with his brother man and, so far as this is humanly possible, with the creator of the universe, can he properly fulfil his high poetic destiny and heritage. Narrow the poet's sympathies, his universal comprehension, by the slightest, most insignificant iota and his work suffers in corresponding ratio and degree.

Most important of all, the poet must know his fellows, must know humanity, must know the world, must know life. Young poets, once more, have broken this rule, have proved superior to it, but only to the scope and extent possible to their age and genius; and precocious genius seldom wears well, while, in regard to the early dying poets who in several instances have seemed almost superhuman in their human understanding, potential future growth and development can only be conjectured. Generally speaking, heart answers to heart, feeling to feeling, emotion to experience, imaginary, personal or

vicarious. For this reason alone, though other good reasons might be advanced in impressive array and number, the poet who secludes himself, refuses his share of the common weal or woe, shuts himself from the common tasks, duties, and adventures of mankind, seldom sings for the multitude, having sadly crippled his gift.

Tennyson, we know, resolutely walled out life's turmoil, but, just as Swinburne's erotic rhapsodies concerning "the lilies and languors of virtue, the roses and raptures of vice" scarce will be remembered so long, as they surely are not loved so widely, as the cool, clear melodic heights attained by Whittier, Longfellow, Alice Meynell, Sara Teasdale, Josephine Preston Peabody, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and many true-visioned singers, so Tennyson, in all reasonable probability, lost largely through lessened contact with his fellows. Was not his greatest, his unforgettable poem, "In Memoriam," written from the depths and heights of his closest touch with passionate human emotions, his love and sorrow for his



friend, his comrade, his *alter ego*, Arthur Hallam? Is not the same thing true of Shelley's incomparable "Adonais?" Have not the poems dearest, most vital to humanity usually been born of intimate love, grief, gladness, been written under stress of vivid personal emotion, poured out, warm and glowing, from the fervent crucible of the heart?

So let it be said once more, with fervent emphasis, that the poet prospective does not well or wisely if he shun contact with the world, the fullest stream of life, the closest contact with his human fellows. "The core of reality is poetry," says James Huneker, pointing a great and double truth, speaking of the poet-musician, Debussy. "He lived not at the circumference but at the hub of things. He loathed the academic."

And Percy MacKaye, recalling, it may be, the brave old days when every educated man wrote verse as naturally as is the case in Japan at present, when Pliny the younger deprecated the growing tendency of his poetic friends (not so different, it would

seem, from their modern fraternity brothers of some two thousand years later!) to compel him to listen to personal reading of their poems, feels that contemporary poets lose much by their failure to sing in unison, to "get together."

Poets, he says, have remained hermits "in a time the most cooperative the earth has ever known. In so choral an age, shall the poets," he asks, "still remain solitary pipers?"

Mr. MacKaye's contention, in passing, gains in strength by comparison with the habits of nature's superlative singers, the untutored, unapproachable minstrels of the woods and fields. The nightingale, the thrush, the blackbird sing their sweetest in the midst of their ordinary environment, the thick of everyday living. The lark rises, truly, but he rises from the thronging center of his special world.

The birds, however — again in passing, — take their practice-training in private, seldom venturing more than a few fugitive, piping notes in the open until the gifts of song, as

of life, have been fully conferred upon them. The analogy is worth noting. The poet prospective does neither well nor wisely if he attempt to write too freely, at all events to publish, before he has had time to live.

For specific training, aside from general education, the poet needs all — and more — than any other artist in the way of technical and super-technical enrichment. In regard to no other art, perhaps, is it so absolutely, imperatively necessary that the art be easy, natural, seemingly unconscious and instinctive. The singer, the sculptor, the painter, the actor, all these, with superior opportunities for softening mistakes, shadowing weak spots or drawing attention from mistakes and failures, expect to study and work for long periods before daring the test of the public square, braving the judgment of their peers, expecting fame's guerdon. Why should the poet alone expect to spring to success full-fledged, like Minerva from the train of Jove? Why should the poet, essaying his 'prentice flights in the heavens of song, be wounded, disappointed, discouraged not to receive im-

mediate return, recognition any more than should any other budding artist? Why should he expect a dispassionate, disinterested public to take palliative account of his youth, his inexperience, his artistic limitations and longings? If the poet, if any artist, produce a bit of perfect work without long and soul-searching if joyous striving, so much the better. The day of miracles is by no means over. The high gods of artistic creation are passing good to their votaries, sometimes. But—the high gods are not always in evidence. Miracles do not happen every hour.

Were the poet prospective trained to apply to his burgeoning art the basic principles applied by other artists, the “disappointments of literature,” the pangs of poetic disillusion would be fewer, less heart-rending, even in these splendid days of poets on every corner, with a new one every hour.

The poet prospective, having made all possible technical preparation, familiarized himself with the work of poetic masters, with the various verse forms, with the mys-

teries of meter, stress, accent, and so on, should then enter upon his practice period—enter upon it in all humility and sweet-spirited devotion. It is assumed that nobody, even in the present day and generation of poetic popularity, not to say notoriety, is so temerarious as to dream of living by poetic production. It is also assumed, concomitantly, that every poet of the future takes reasonable care to provide himself with means of present subsistence. Such course, indubitably, is that of sagacity and prudence. Then let the poet prospective, while earning his daily bread in some more immediately lucrative manner, devote to his growing art the precious fruits and period of his leisure, keeping abreast, meanwhile, of all that his fellow-poets farther along the bright, steep road to Olympus may be doing. If, now and then, he be lucky enough to sell a bit of verse, a poem, let him be glad and rejoice greatly, be stimulated, as only success can stimulate, to further endeavor. But he need not expect to do this too often, nor, indeed, should he try.

A fair part of the poet's preparation—

speaking of the work of his fellows—may well consist of more or less frequent conversations with other climbing poets, of the eager, ardent talk about poetry and things allied that youth, that artists love so dearly. Out of such communion much good has grown and more will grow, in poetic as in personal connection. We may yet enjoy the community poetizing, presumably something like community singing, that Mr. MacKaye has suggested. Good craft talk must be of benefit to the talkers, always. But let the talk be honest, not of "Work spelled with a large W and performed with a small one," as a clever critic recently suggested a similar situation. And let the talkers shun, as they would the plague—or fear of plagiarism—all hint of professional superiority or exclusion. The time has gone by for the relegation of the most human, as the highest, of arts to the cloistered study or the lonely studio or attic. Poets, to fulfil their right and manifest mission, must be one with those for whom they would sing and serve.

For purely technical reasons it is assumed



that the poet prospective will seek to know all possible about his chosen tools and angels, will study with deep-seated love and reverence those wonderful symbols, the words which will so fitly, exquisitely express his every thought and shade of meaning; that he will strive, as much by the constant reading and assimilation of great poetry and good prose as by more direct personal effort, to enlarge his vocabulary and enrich his own flow of language, ideas, and imagination. This study of words, in itself a never-ending joy and pleasure, must never be forgotten, neglected if the poet, prospective or actual, would keep his tool-box well supplied, his implements in good working order. But let him never forget that the words *are* tools, mainly, NOT mere decorative jewels, and that they are to be used and treated as such.

Which brings us, again, by logical sequence, to the vexed and burning questions of the rhyming dictionary and poetic license. And here the poetic adviser, mindful of the hydra-headed lions guarding the path in all directions, would tip her words with fire.



Poetic license, so called, may be expunged from the discussion without hesitation or quarter. It belongs, if, indeed, it can claim most shadowy right to existence, to the realm of genius, genius which occasionally can afford to take liberties and play havoc with poetic proprieties in manner quite inexcusable to others and hardly to be excused, in some instances, to the greatest of the great ones. Poetic license never yet made a great poet greater, and it frequently is to be regretted that men and women of acknowledged genius should pay so little heed, upon occasion, to the apt if incomplete definition of their God-given endowment which describes it as "the taking of infinite pains."

Making all due allowance for other poetic aspects and features, it is certain that the poets who have taken infinite pains in regard to the polishing of their poems—and these have been more numerous than, perhaps, is generally suspected, especially in regard to those poets whose works read most smoothly and spontaneously—have the strongest hold upon everlasting fame.

For the rhyming dictionary—its use should be restricted to those who will promise never to use it. As with the stimulant Theodore Roosevelt ceased to take upon his exploration trips because "I learned that the emergencies for which it was provided never happened," while for all ordinary occasions hot tea proved better, the emergencies in which a rhyming dictionary might seem indispensable are the very ones in which it is most especially and peculiarly unsafe to depend upon its aid. Sense and soul must always take precedence of melody and rhyme and rhythm, and when a rhyme must be wrung, willy-nilly, from the secret store of the rhyming dictionary it is almost inevitable that soul and sense must suffer. It would be asking too much of mere human probabilities to expect aught else.

The use of the rhyming dictionary, moreover, has betrayed into inexcusable, sometimes ridiculous rhymes and near-rhymes many a foolish, indolent, weary or too trusting poet. And the fact that a false or foolish rhyme may be truthfully attributed to

Browning or other ranking poet is nothing in its favor—or his.

Better, far better, abandon the most alluring of lines than force into existence a rhyme which has no real reason for being. For—and this brings us close to the most important thing that can be said or thought in regard to the writing of poetry, the crux and climax of the entire poetry-writing subject—the way of saying a thing matters so much less than the thing to be said.

Now, indeed, comes the indubitable moment for capitals, capitals which should be shaped of flashing fire. THE ONE INDISPENSABLE FACTOR OF POETRY WRITING, THE MAKING OF A POEM, IS THE HAVING SOMETHING TO SAY!

A knack at versification, to say nothing of the easy writing of free verse, is common enough at present. Graceful lines and combinations of lines are superabundant among us ; almost anyone can so manipulate words and sentences as to more or less distantly and distinctly resemble poetry. Of good poetic

ability, talent, as of good poetic style and manner, the English speaking world surely lacks little. But—the poetic knack is not all.

“So many of our writers are able to string pretty words and lines together,” thus, thoughtfully, a well-read man professionally conversant with the ever growing literature of the period, “but so many of them seem to be intellectually empty and dry.”

Here, then, is the veriest inmost heart of the inmost poetic kernel. Have something to say!

English classes, study, practice, the gift of imitation, a trick of piquant or graceful expression, these will teach one how to compose lines and poem forms classically perfect, perhaps even emotionally attractive, to turn out fairly deceptive simulacra of poetic productions. The public may be induced to read, and even praise them. In some cases a more or less meretricious reputation may follow. But just as the sculptor who carves, the artist who paints, the singer who carols most brilliantly, may leave the hearer, the spec-

tator untouched of inner uplifting, so the poet who fails of real message has but won craft or technical glory, appealed to the reader, the hearer, on mere mechanical ground.

The secret of the divine spark has not yet been made known to humanity. No child of man yet has learned how to breathe the breath of life into another. And while such prerogative remains the prerogative of the Almighty only the writing of real poetry, true poetry, can neither be taught nor learned save only to and by those to whom has been granted at least a touch of the divine afflatus.

Granted a poet's inborn, God-given message to his fellows, his God-given power of verbal music and singing, it is possible to extend real help in the way of assisting the said poet to acquire necessary basis of technical knowledge, necessary background and perspective, ease, grace, and vigor of expression. Practice makes perfect in poetry as in any other form of art endeavor. But it is not yet possible to endow the poet with the justifying message, to provide him with material out of which true poems can be made.

Practice poetry all you will or may, indulge in all the poetic craft-work you desire and can find time for, but never imagine that you are writing poetry unless the poem insists upon being written, the song, at least in the beginning, insists upon singing itself. Work, finish, polish, all these are necessary, as a rule, when the poem, the song has taken unto itself preliminary form and shaping, but there must be a foundation upon which to labor. It is not, humanly speaking, possible to dig or draw from one's mental stores, one's inner consciousness, a plan for a poem as one draws from one's intellectual or material files plot or material for a short story, a novel. The thing must be there to begin with. The nucleus of the true poem, the real poem, must be found, not made.

And when is posited the question: "What shall I write about?" the answer, if this question be asked in poetic connection, is inevitable. It must be, if honestly delivered:

"Wait until the writing impulse makes itself evident. Until you know what to write about, don't write at all."



## WINDOW-WISHING

Oh yes, we get off regular  
By half past six,  
And six on Saturdays.  
Sister an' I go marketing on Saturday nights,  
Everything's down.  
Besides there's Sunday comin';  
You can sleep,  
Oh my, how you can sleep!  
No mother shakin' you  
To "get up now,"  
No coffee smell  
Hurryin' you while you dress,  
No Beauty Shop to get to on the tick of the  
minute  
Or pony up a fine.  
Sister an' I go window-wishin'  
Sunday afternoon, all over the Loop.  
It's lots of fun.  
First she'll choose what she thinks is the  
prettiest  
Then my turn comes.



You mustn't ever choose a thing  
The other's lookin' at,  
And when a window's done  
The one that beats  
Can choose the first time when we start the  
next.

The hats are hardest  
'Specially when they're turnin' round and  
round.  
But window-wishin's great!

Then there's the pictures,  
Bully ones sometimes,  
Sometimes they're queer.  
Sister an' I go in 'most every Sunday.  
We took Mother 'long last week,  
But she didn't like 'em any too well.  
Mother's old, you know,  
We have to kinda humor her.  
Next day she couldn't remember a single  
thing  
But the lions on the steps.

You know what happened the other night?  
Sister an' I didn't know just what to do, —

A gentleman came to see us.  
He said Jim asked him to  
Sometime when he was near.  
Jim's my brother, you know.  
He lives down state.  
We have to send him part of our wages  
regular,  
Sister an' I ;  
He doesn't seem to get a steady place,  
An' Mother likes us to.  
She's dotty on Jim.  
Sometimes I get real nasty —  
A great big man like that!

Anyway his friend came walkin' in  
An' said Jim sent his love.  
Sister an' I didn't exactly know what to do,  
And Mother looked so queer!  
Her dress was awful dirty.  
He said he was livin' in Chicago,  
And Sister said she hoped  
He had a place he liked.  
He only stayed a little while,  
Till half past eight,  
And then he took his hat

From under the chair he was sittin' on  
And went away.

I said just now it happened the other night,  
But it was seven weeks ago last Friday  
evening.

He said he'd come again.

I dunno as he will,

Sister an' I keep wonderin'.

We dressed up every night for quite a  
while

An' stayed in Sundays.

Yesterday we thought

We'd go down window-wishin'

And what do you think?

Just as she'd picked a lovely silver dress

Sister jerked my arm,

Then all of a sudden there she was

Cryin' an' sniffin' in her handkerchief

Standin' there on the sidewalk,

And what do you think she said?

"I'd like to kill the woman that wears that  
gown!"

I tell you I was scared,

She looked so queer,

But she's all right today.

Oh thank you, two o'clock next Saturday the  
tenth?

I'll put it down,

A shampoo and a wave, you said?

I'll keep the time,

Good morning.

—Mary Aldis.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POET'S SERVICE

MUCH is heard and read, in these thoughtful days of humanity's quickened sense of mutual responsibility, of "social service," "the humanitarian impulse," of "duty to one's fellow-man," et cetera. We have learned, of late, how each of us affects and influences the other, whether or no we will to do so. Not so much is said of the poet, in this connection, as of more obvious social workers. Yet humanity certainly owes, and in all ages and periods of the world's development has owed, the poets great debt and service.

"Let me make the songs of a nation and I care not who makes its laws" is a wise saying. For man does not live by bread alone, and that which inspires, pleases, quickens, thrills, will have far more effect upon him, at least

more lasting effect upon him, than that which merely regulates his behavior, keeps him in the straight and narrow way.

Poets always have inspired men, groups, nations to great efforts. The surprise too commonly manifested during the Great War that the poets should, in such large numbers, be soldiers, the soldiers in such large numbers poets, was gratuitous and uncalled for. Soldiers always have been singers, ever since the world's earliest recorded conflicts. Always the minstrel has rushed into battle, yearning, perhaps, for the poignant thrill so grateful to his eager nature, swift to seek, to render poetic justice, to right another's wrong. And always the minstrel, the poet, has stirred to martial action those of his fellow-citizens less articulate, less eloquent, less gifted in the way of song.

The Great War, however, brought home to moderns in a way otherwise impossible the marked influence of the poet on his time and his companions. "The poets were not fooled," as well says a contemporary writer, and the blame as well as the mighty issues

of the Great War lay clear before their unclouded and prophetic vision. French, English, Belgian, Italian, Canadian, Australian, American, they were as one in trumpeting the high, proud necessity of standing by the right, in foretelling the downfall of the lords of horror, the dawn of earth's day of universal freedom. In the darkest hours of the hideous war-night the poets glimpsed before them the promise of coming peace and glory. Who can judge, measure, overestimate the power for good of those brave and splendid souls who, themselves hastening unselfishly into danger, from the beginning of hostilities, the first grim presage, sang in such brave and splendid chorus?

Who can judge, measure, overestimate the power for good of such poems as Brooke's "The Soldier," Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," McCrae's "In Flanders' Fields," Kilmer's "Rouge Bouquet," the rich and inspiring music of Jean Botrel and Emile Verhaeren and each and every member of the Allies' glorious army of military singers? Who can judge, measure, over-



estimate the patriotic, humanitarian service rendered by such simpler bards as Robert W. Service and the brave American woman who wrote the words for "Keep the Home Fires Burning," and whose life was sacrificed in one of the earliest London raids? Those homely, tender lines, like the nobler but scarcely more beloved "Battle Hymn of the Republic," probably made more soldiers, more *real* soldiers, fighting men enthusiastic and ardent, than all the draft regulations and patriotic speeches that the war could bring to be.

The stay-at-home soldiers, they who from the duty lines of ordinary life and living supported their brothers in uniform, these also gained much by and from the brave singing of the war poets, in and out of khaki, nor have they—the noncombatants and the women—acquitted themselves ignobly in poetic regard. The quality of the newer war poetry, moreover, has been of high order. Praise of war, as war, talk of the glory of war, as war, have been conspicuously absent, as conspicuously absent as the gold lace long

so resplendent upon soldierly uniforms; we know war, now, for the grim and awful thing it is, we make no attempt to soften its terrors or uplift its degrading effect and influence. The poets, always in advance of the common run in sensing, interpreting national and spiritual values, from the beginning of the recent upheaval have left unsung war's long honored glories, told the ugly truth about it. They have even dared to interpret to and for us the terrible war fears always, heretofore, shrouded in tacit repression, treated as mean, cowardly, constructively nonexistent. This honesty and insight, notable from the first ringing calls to courage and strong action to the latest rejoicing over the cessation of conflict, have resulted in an entirely new kind of poetry, strange, tender, deeply thoughtful and deeply true.

"The poet," as Gerald Chittenden justly says, is "in his proper office, a prophet, an interpreter of racial emotions, and poetry is a still pool, reflecting the ambitions and despairs, the admirations and the contempts of mankind." The attitude of mankind to-

ward war and its results having undergone marked transformation, the poetry of the Great War has been similarly transformed.

And the poets, first to see the truth in regard to battle, likewise were first to see the forecasting shadow of the Great Peace still scarcely dreamed of in the market places of humanity. "Our poets," says Chittenden again, "have become in a true sense our prophets; they have not only dreamed of the 'parliament of man, the federation of the world,' but have cleared from our path the first and heaviest obstacles that lay in the way of its achievement." And not the least of the social services rendered by the "essential war industry" of poetry making has been that of bringing home to war-worn humanity the truth that human beings still are brothers, that, no matter how torn and tattered the cloud-drapings of universal fraternity, international fellowship, in its heart of hearts humanity still and always is and will be as one.

And not in war alone do the poets prove their superlative value to their fellows, their

high calling as evangelists and apostles of the truest good. When have they not exalted the world and its children by inspiring to just and proud and unselfish and noble endeavors? Setting aside their uplifting inspiration of pure beauty, as earlier and always gratefully acknowledged, what need, what yearning, what aspiration of striving mankind have they not fathered and furthered and served?

Take, for example, the cause of too long neglected labor. From poetic support and recognition what has it not gained?

“But no sound of trump of angel  
Brings the slave his glad evangel”

sang Longfellow, himself by his sympathetic poem doing much to sound for the enslaved the “glad evangel” of fast-coming freedom.

“Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers?” so Elizabeth Barrett Browning voiced the sick heartache shortly proving so potent to help the little, toiling creatures who pulled so poignantly at her heart-strings.

Florence Wilkinson in "The Factory Flower" composed a later and equally unforgettable indictment of certain forms of child labor. Who could read this indictment unmoved?

Lisabetta, Marianina, Fiametta, Teresina,  
They are winding stems of roses, one by one,  
                    one by one,

Little children who have never learned to  
                    play ;

Teresina softly crying that her fingers ache  
                    today ;

Tiny Fiametta nodding when the twilight  
                    slips in, gray.

High above the clattering street, ambulance  
                    and fire-gong beat,

They sit, curling crimson petals, one by one,  
                    one by one.

Lisabetta, Marianina, Fiametta, Teresina,  
They have never seen a rosebush nor a dew-  
                    drop in the sun.

They will dream of the vendetta, Teresina,  
                    Fiametta,

Of a Black Hand and a face behind a grat-  
ing ;  
They will dream of cotton petals, endless,  
crimson, suffocating,  
Never of a wild-rose thicket nor the singing  
of a cricket,  
But the ambulance will bellow through the  
wanness of their dreams,  
And their tired lids will flutter with the  
street's hysteric screams.

Lisabetta, Marianina, Fiametta, Teresina,  
They are winding stems of roses, one by one,  
one by one.  
Let them have a long, long playtime, Lord  
of toil, when toil is done,  
Fill their baby hands with roses, joyous roses  
of the sun!

Louis Untermeyer, in "Caliban in the Coal Mines," has produced a labor-plea as haunting, soul-searching as Lucy Larcom's "Hannah's at the Window, Binding Shoes," or Margaret Widdemer's "The Factories." Consider the simple, terrible strength of

"Caliban in the Coal Mines," its stark nakedness of bitter, arraigning truth.

God, we don't like to complain,  
We know that the mine is no lark—  
But—there's the pools from the rain;  
But—there's the cold and the dark.

God, You don't know what it is—  
You, in Your well-lighted sky,  
Watching the meteors whizz;  
Warm, with the sun always by.

God, if You had but the moon  
Stuck in Your cap for a lamp,  
Even You'd tire of it soon,  
Down in the dark and the damp.

Nothing but blackness above,  
And nothing that moves but the  
cars—

God, if You wish for our love,  
Fling us a handful of stars!

Margaret Widdemer, again, in "Teresa's Face" sounds a tocsin none the less



harrowingly impressive for the surging undercurrent of human tenderness and emotion that leaves the reader's heart bleeding, the eyes moist, the soul shivering and sick. Nobody, reading this pulsing human document, ever again could think lightly of the sore trials and troubles of sundry innocent, perplexed and exploited "strangers within our gates."

He saw it last of all before they herded in  
the steerage,  
Dark against the sunset where he lingered  
by the hold,  
The tear-stained, dusk-rose face of her, the  
little Teresina  
Sailing out to lands of gold.

Ah, his days were long, long days, still toiling  
in the vineyard,  
Working for the gold to set him free to go  
to her,  
Where gay there glowed the flower-face of  
little Teresina,  
Where all joy and riches were:

Hard to find one rose-face where the dark  
    rose-faces cluster,  
Where the outland laws are strange and out-  
    land voices hum—  
Only one lad's hoping, and the word of  
    Teresina,  
Who would wait for him to come:

. . . . .  
*God grant he may not find her, since he may  
    not win her freedom,  
Nor yet be great enough to love in such  
    marred, captive guise  
The patient, painted face of her, the little  
    Teresina,  
With its cowed, all-knowing eyes!*

“Window-Wishing,” the Mary Aldis poem appearing elsewhere in this volume, is another keenly telling member of the glorious galaxy of poems that, serving truth through love and beauty, life through sympathetic interpretation, have helped, are helping to remake and reform the world.

The same proud claim applies in all known poetic directions. Are not the poets, one and all, in their several manners now calling the world to a truer conception of human rights, of social progress, of freedom, just as they have called in all times and ages, from Homer down to Kilmer—Kilmer who, like so many of his brother soldier-poets, gave his life joyously to the cause of right as he had given his heart before it; from Byron, burning to set Greece free, to Ledwidge, dying in behalf of outraged Belgium, the poet-soul always has thrilled and responded to this noblest of natural impulses and passions. Without the poets, the soldiers might have fought in vain in behalf of all these causes. For a cold and intellectual conception of right and wrong moves no man to fight for sake of his suffering fellows. The sword, mainly, is helpless lacking the song.

Religion—now, as poetry itself, brought closer to human life, more intimately intermingled with the thought of the people than at any time since the medieval era; justice,

love of God, of man, of country; courage, tenderness, power of altruistic self-giving, where would these be, where would they have been in all the history of mankind without the devotion, the inspiration of the poets, the poets who, whatever may be said, suggested to the contrary, never are remote from the throbbing heart of humanity, but always near, akin to its keenest needs, its most eager desires and hungers and emotions? The Biblical poets, the poets of Old Rome, of Greece, of all the ancient peoples and races and civilizations, out of the fullness of their life and love and worship sang in unforgettable strains and measures. A mighty choir of lesser voices, now piping, now whispering, now diapason-deep and glorious, has followed them, rings on always, always urging, inspiring men and women to greater, more unselfish efforts and endeavors. Beauty, in all its forms, has been served by similar sweet and majestic chorus; goodness, nobility, whole-souled devotion to truth and light and sweetness and holy living, been fed by

the same high-hearted and wonderful allegiance. Motherhood glory, greatness, innocence, the love of little children, all these have received pure and transfiguring accolade at the hands of the poets. Love—what poet has not sung beautifully of the wondrous grace of love?

Examples, love lyrics without number might be given, as, indeed, examples of all the other branches and fields of the poets' rare and magnificent social service. No human thought, feeling, or need has been left untouched of their magic halo. But out of such wealth and multiplicity of splendor how choose, with anything like clarity or justice, for single reproduction, how make an end of quotation, quotation once allowed to begin? Let us, rather, be content to point the way to the lovers' lanes, the hearts' highways hallowed by all the singers of all the ages, then allow the student of poetry, following the guidepost's loving indication, to find and joy in these hallowed lanes and highways, these glad poetic byways, by himself.

Tolstoy, justly or unjustly, has been

quoted as saying that nothing was ever said in poetry which could not be better said in plain prose; and Tolstoy, himself in his own way a true poet, must be listened to with respect upon all occasions. But in this particular connection truth probably lies rather with Max Eastman, who believes that "From the standpoint of one who wishes to experience the intrinsic nature of a thing spoken of, it is entirely true that nothing was ever said in plain language which could not be better said in poetry." Witness, it may be, the uncounted lovers who, brimming with lyric emotions have enlisted the aid of their favorite poet so to express this lyric emotion as to awaken swiftest, deepest response from the breast of the only maid.

Here, surely, paying no heed to the many other ways and moods in which children of men have been served by the poets, are reasons enough why every child of man may rejoice to feel the poetic impulse stirring within him, answers enough to the earlier propounded query of "Why Write Poetry?" For if he who makes two blades of grass



grow where but one previously flourished deserves well at the hands and hearts of his fellows, surely he who brings to bloom a high thought, a noble desire, a sweet emotion, a glad aspiration, deserves much and far more.

It is the poets who keep alive in the world the things and attributes and attitudes best worth preserving. It is the poets who remind us, recurrently, of the superiority of sunlight to gold, moonlight and starshine to silver, music to the shouting of the multitude, love to the comradeship of monarchs, calm friendship to the adoration of the crowd.

It is the poets, too, who teach us to worship pure beauty and goodness, who help us, from time to time, to readjust our moral standards in harmony with the Eternal Verities, and who, despite their much speaking as to the unmoral nature of artistic effort, not to say the silly chattering of the novelty seeking mob anent the occasional immorality of poets, usually have been conscious of and lived up to their high calling and estate.



Most poets worthy the name have well served humanity in the spiritual connection, have done nobly in the matter of the spiritual teaching of their fellows. They have sung strongly and splendidly and sweetly because, in the language of one of their most beloved members, their hearts in the main have been pure.

Thus to serve humanity, if only in slightest measure, in the most rearward ranks of the singing army, is to be made free of the greatest company of living and translated saints and minstrels and heroes. It is to be one with all the harmonic powers of the universe, from the chirping cricket to the singing star-constellations. It is to be part of the secret core of every human being, young or older, proud and humble, great and small. It is to be ever youthful and pristine and spring-like because in tune with all the pristine, springing life and youth of the world.

Is it not worth while, O poet prospective and poetic questioner, to be, even in thought and aspiration and impulse, part of a band, a company so fine?

## TO A RIVER GOD

There is a river flowing,  
Fast flowing toward the sea;  
Past bluff and levee blowing,  
His mantle glances free;  
Past pine and corn and cotton-field  
His foam-winged sandals flee.

From dock and dune and reedy brake,  
Through lock and basin wide,  
Long-linked lagoon and terraced lake  
Drop down to watch his pride,  
And rivers North and rivers South  
To speed his coursing ride.

*Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,  
Cotton-drift and cane,  
Serried lances rippling fleet,  
Dappled tides of grain,  
Dip beside him where he goes  
Flying to the main.*

By full-sown fields and fallow,  
By furrows green and bluff,  
Past bar and rock-bound shallow,  
His torrent washes gruff.  
By tamarack and mallow,  
Past bottom-land and bluff.

From highland and from lowland,  
Farm, town, and city see  
His foam-winged footsteps going,  
His mantle blowing free,  
Past dusky mart and black-spired crown,  
Fast flowing to the sea.

*Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,  
Cotton-drift and cane,  
Serried lances rippling fleet,  
Dappled tides of grain,  
Dip beside him where he goes  
Speeding to the main.*

His foot runs on the ages' bed  
Of gullied cave and rock,  
With bison skull and arrowhead  
His yellow waters lock,

Past vanished trails and tribal dead  
His fleecing currents flock.

By bluff and levee blowing,  
By oats and rye unshorn,  
His silver mantle flowing,  
Flicks east and west untorn,  
Unfurling from Itasca to  
Louisiana's horn.

*Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,  
Cotton-drift and cane,  
Serried lances rippling fleet,  
Dappled tides of grain,  
Dip beside him where he goes  
Rushing to the main.*

What tribute, racing spirit,  
What token will you take,  
Through stain and desecration,  
Past town and terraced lake,  
To distant sea and nation  
From cotton, corn, and brake?

What tribute are you bearing  
Past plain and pluming tree,

By bluff and levee faring  
On foam-winged footsteps free—  
What beauty for the hold of time,  
And souls unborn, to see?

*Poplar on the Northern steep,  
Cotton-drift and cane,  
Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,  
Rippled tides of grain,  
Brake and bayou ask of you  
Buoyed toward the main.*

By rock and cavern blowing,  
Flocked field and pluming tree,  
Past bluff and levee going  
On foam-winged footsteps free,  
By rapid, lock, and terraced lake,  
Forever to the sea.

—Edith Franklin Wyatt.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

**H**ERE, then, for the benefit of those who have read thus far, is the summing up of the story. Briefed, the substance of the foregoing chapters may be presented something like this:

*First. Why Write Poetry?* Well, why shouldn't you? The writing of poetry, the attempt to write poetry, will injure nobody and may give somebody—perhaps many somebodies—pleasure. And the mental and spiritual attitudes normally most conducive to good poetry certainly will be beneficial to the writer. Besides, the writing of poetry, since it develops artistic perception, is the best possible preparation for the fuller enjoyment of life, as for writing, enjoyment, appreciation of fine prose.

*Secondly. We Must Have a Skeleton.* Correct anatomical structure, a good skele-

ton, adequate and fitting framework, is as necessary to a good poem as a well-harmonized physical system, a good skeleton, adequate frame is to the efficient human body. For this reason the foundation facts of poetic construction—stress, meter, accent, rhythm, rhyme and so on—must first receive proper attention if the finished product is to be of worth-while nature. But technical analysis of these foundation facts is but lightly considered, in present connection, since it is assumed that every poetic aspirant in the very beginning of his ambition acquires at least working facility and familiarity with prosodic preliminaries. The purpose of this modest work is as far removed from poetic dissection or vivisection as from production of a poetic corset. “Pay much attention to your attire in the dressing-room, none at all in the drawing-room” is a sartorial rule that might well be adapted to the writing of poetry. All the tasks of elementary education, technical as general, should have been accomplished before the would-be poet sits him down to poetic com-



position. And *How to Write Poetry*, while offering ardent first aid to the poetically eager, in no sense invades the realm of purely technical work.

*Thirdly. The Clothing Substance.* After the framework the covering, after the skeleton the smooth, graceful, rugged, or classic garment of flesh or form. Over firm and fitting bony structure, Nature drapes the mantle of softening, sweetly tinted tissues that utterly transform, transfigure it to higher loveliness and uses. As naturally, harmonious verbal garbing follows creation, production of a basal poetic idea or structure. The poet prospective, again it is assumed, is conversant with the simpler, better-known verse forms, but examples of a few of the less usual are given, for the sake of convenient reference and because wide and widely varied poetic practice, experiment—but not, necessarily, publication—is advised.

*Fourthly. The Indwelling Spirit.* Suit style to subject, poetic form to poetic fancy, fact, or message. Sometimes study im-

proves poetic form fitting, may even be necessary to determine which of the many available poetic shapes is best suited to the poetic idea still in more or less fluid condition. But art, even the art that conceals art, always should be subordinated to spirit, inspiration, in such juncture; the best possible form for a given poem is that which seems most natural, inevitable, which most nearly insists upon being. The most magical of "make-up artists" never can approach the exquisite and haunting wonder of the beauty innocent of all artificial assistance. Other things being equal, the simplest form is best and most pleasing. And the poet whose gift by slightest hairbreadth falls short of genius should never, *never*, NEVER, *NEVER* attempt the creation of new forms, the variation of those acknowledged standard, well recognized, well known.

*Fifthly. Poetic Equipment.* Preliminary and contemporary and progressive and never-ending education of the poet should include all possible scope and variety and development and form of knowledge. Espe-

cially should it embrace study of that most marvelous of all symbols, the word, spoken and written, of vocabulary, diction, and kindred subjects. Most imperatively should it comprehend deep and wide acquaintance with life, as actual, varied living. It should be richer for the highest ethical atmosphere and altitude in which the ego is capable of existing. It should *NOT* include a rhyming dictionary, poets being merely human and therefore humanly prone to temptation, nor — poetic license. First, last, and always, the poet's indispensable equipment should be founded on **SOMETHING TO SAY**.

*Sixthly. The Poet's Service.* The poet's contribution in behalf of humanity, the best, most conclusive of answers to the moot matter of "How to Write Poetry" as, also, of "Why Write It?" From the dawn of time, the infancy of the world the poets have saved the world for their fellows, have kept alive the world's faith and fervor, its sense and sensibilities, its heroism and its hearth-love, its sentiment and its sacred fires, its ever-changing and ever-endangered evaluation

and appreciation of all sweet high things, of nature, of love, of virtue, of honor, of courage, of truth, of beauty. The poets will do so, always, until earth's sun and moon shall set, her stars shall fall, her period be over. Never more clearly, purely, have they proved their right to the heart's kingdom than in the reign of terror through which a stricken universe has just passed, from which it is narrowly, breathlessly emerging. Without the poets—but we shrink from the mere idea!

*Seventhly. The Conclusion of the Whole Matter*—That which we are now saying: The epitomizing of the story, the envoy, the curtain-drop, the coda, the cordial hand-wave to all eager servers in poetry's cause, all devoted soldiers of the poet's banner—at once Hail, Farewell, and God Speed You!

A kiss of the fingers as we slip back into friendly silence, a "Top o' the mornin' and all sweet dreams to you!" salutation. A lightsome, lilting "Till we meet again!" message and signal to whomever may have accompanied us a little way along poetry's shimmering road.

For the inevitable very last word and postscript: Here's to all poetry, poetry lovers, and poets! Here's to the day when poetry universally shall be accorded just, supreme, and undisputed place in the high artistic hierarchy! Here's to all honest efforts to bring such reasonable gladness about!

God bless you, Fellow-travelers, and the spirit of true poetry go with you! Be happy! The best of poetic Good Luck!

## ROUGE BOUQUET

[Dedicated to the memory of nineteen members of Company E, ——— Infantry, who made the supreme sacrifice at Rouge Bouquet, forest of Parroy, France, March 7, 1918. Read by the chaplain at the funeral, the refrain echoing the music of taps from a distant grove; written by Sergeant Joyce Kilmer, poet, newspaper man, and author, killed in action near the Ourcq, July 30, 1918. Sergeant Kilmer had volunteered his services to the major of the foremost battalion because his own battalion would not be in the lead that day.]

In a wood they call the Rouge Bouquet

There is a new-made grave today,

Built by never a spade nor pick

Yet covered with earth ten meters thick.

There lie many fighting men,

Dead in their youthful prime,

Never to laugh nor love again

Nor taste the Summertime.

For Death came flying through the air

And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,

Touched his prey and left them there,

Clay to clay.

He hid their bodies stealthily



In the soil of the land they fought to free  
And fled away.

Now, over the grave abrupt and clear  
Three volleys ring;  
And perhaps their brave young spirits hear  
The bugle sing:

“Go to sleep!

Go to sleep!

Slumber well where the shell screamed and  
fell.

Let your rifles rest on the muddy floor,  
You will not need them any more.

Danger's past;

Now at last,

Go to sleep!”

There is on earth no worthier grave  
To hold the bodies of the brave  
Than this place of pain and pride  
Where they nobly fought and nobly died.  
Never fear but in the skies  
Saints and angels stand  
Smiling with their holy eyes  
On this new-come band.

St. Michael's sword darts through the air



And touches the aureole on his hair,  
And he sees them stand saluting there

His stalwart sons;

And Patrick, Brigid, Columkill

Rejoice that in veins of warriors still

The Gael's blood runs.

And up to Heaven's doorway floats,

From the wood called Rouge Bouquet,

A delicate cloud of bugle notes

That softly say:

"Farewell!

Farewell!

Comrades true, born anew, peace to you!

Your souls shall be where the heroes are

And your memory shine like the morning-  
star.

Brave and dear,

Shield us here.

Farewell!"

—JOYCE KILMER.

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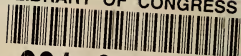
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